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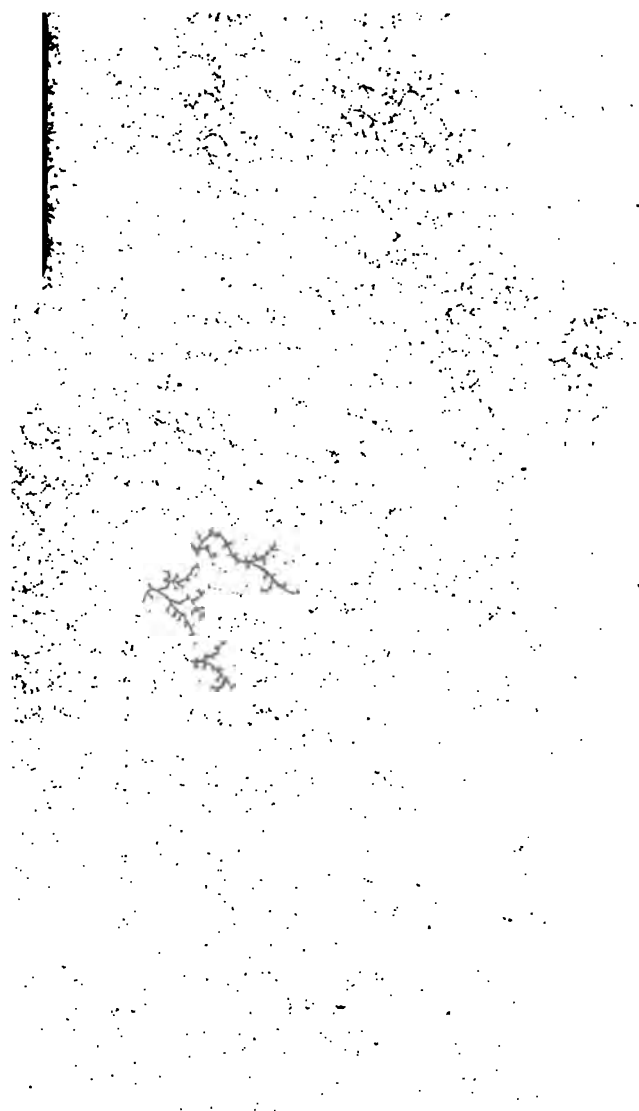
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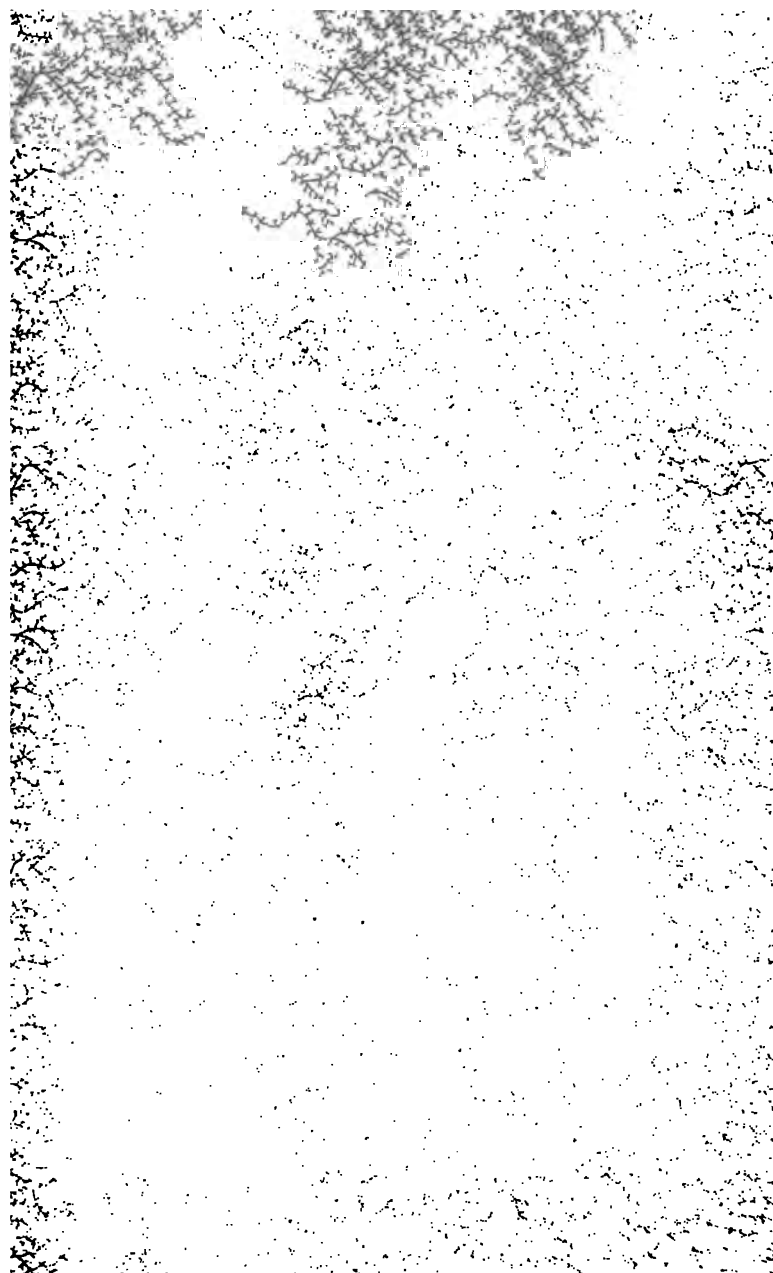
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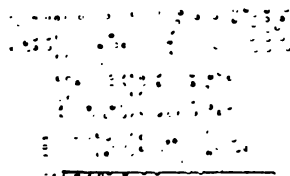


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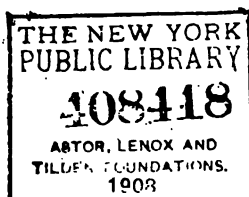
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MISS MORDECK'S FATHER^{9.18.0}

BY
FANI PUSEY GOOCH



NEW YORK
DODD, MEAD & COMPANY
PUBLISHERS



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MISS MORDECK'S FATHER.

CHAPTER I.

THE north-bound Monon limited had pursued the even tenor of its monotonous way for so many consecutive hours that the solitary occupant of the parlor-car, a young girl, had been reduced to a longing anticipation of any diversion, short of a wreck, when the train slowed up unexpectedly at a small station.

She pressed her face against the frosted window-pane and, espying a fellow-creature—albeit an utter stranger to her—greeted him unconsciously with her eager welcoming eyes.

An expression of pleased surprise lighted up the stranger's face, and, raising his hat, he turned and walked rapidly down the platform.

A slight accession of color was the only sign of discomfiture betrayed by the young traveler, and the self-possessed way in which she set about undoing the mischief wrought by her unguarded eyes showed her skilled in averting the result of awkward contretemps.

If the stranger had had any intention of presuming upon that accidental glance, it would seem

that he thought better of it when he entered the car and noted the quiet, ignoring attitude of the young lady.

His subsequent conduct puzzled her. An apologetic or crestfallen appearance, or even an angry look, would have been only what she anticipated, but she could not account for an indifferent shrug. Perhaps he had really mistaken her for someone else; if so, her excessively stiff attitude was absurd. In the mental reaction she whirled her chair around to face the aisle. Instantly, as if an electric current regulated the relative positions of the seats in this particular coach, the opposite chair performed a like semi-revolution and a *dos-à-dos* was transformed into a *vis-à-vis*.

"Have you concluded to recognize me?" said the stranger.

"Ought I really to know you, then?" his companion replied, with a charming, puzzled glance.

He looked at her for a moment in a quiet, mirthful way. "You do it admirably, my dear, but what is your object?"

A cold, contemptuous look came into the girl's eyes as she turned again to the window, saying simply: "I have made a mistake."

"Naida, you can be very trying sometimes?"

Naida—who was not Naida at all, but another young lady altogether—lifted her face, warmed by a comprehending smile, to the moody one looking down at her.

"You mistake—"

"I seem of late to be in a chronic state of mistaking. It was only a few weeks ago I imagined I saw you on the street with a man I should be ashamed to walk with—but that is past. Where have you been?"

"To Louisville."

"To meet your father?"

"No."

He questioned no further, but his look was interrogatory.

"I have been visiting friends," said she, and wondered at the incredulous look on his face, even though she did not lose sight of the fact that her answers were those of a pseudo Naida. She rather enjoyed the situation. It was not her fault that he was still laboring under a mistake, and in the mean time there could be no harm in studying this very dogmatic young man, and trying to find out what had stamped upon his face that habitual look of distrust.

"Did you have a pleasant visit?" he inquired.

"Very."

"How long have you been gone?"

"Two weeks."

"You must have had an exhilarating time," he said, opening his eyes in ironic surprise, "for it to have seemed so long." Evidently he had seen the true Naida in the interval; and she decided that she had better make another attempt to disabuse him of his rather persistent error.

"Seem long? On the contrary, the time passed

rapidly—so rapidly, in fact, that upon second thought I find I have crowded almost three weeks into two," she explained with calm anticipation of his surprise, but in her turn nonplussed at the expression of angry reproach in eyes which, a moment before distinctly gray, would now easily pass for black.

"Has it been three weeks since I took you to see Irving?"

"Three centuries—if you ever took me at all—as it must have been in some previous state of existence," retorted she with a smiling shrug.

"What do you mean by that?" said he, his voice and manner neither loud nor fierce, but his look as "serenely terrible as a well-aimed rifle."

The smile left her face and her heart sank peculiarly; but she was no novice at traveling alone, even though she was an acknowledged beauty and the daughter of a millionaire, and she proceeded to display some of the decision of character that saves American big brothers many an unpleasant duty.

"I mean," said she, with the serenity that comes only of an equable temperament or much contact with the world, "that I never saw you before in all my life, and that you have mistaken me for some one else."

"Naida, indulge your caprice without prevarication, if possible."

"Sir!"

"I say don't lie about such a trivial thing. I

am willing that you should carry your whim to any extreme that pleases you, but it is foolish to try to impose upon me.—Oh, Naida! how can one so perfect in all things else be lacking in the noblest attribute of woman?"

"Sir, you are insulting: I am not she for whom you take me—you mistake me for—"

"Mistake you? mistake the face I know better than I ever knew my own mother's—the face that is never from before my eyes a moment of my existence, waking or sleeping,—the face that I worship as was never mortal thing worshiped before?—Great God! Naida, you try me beyond expression!" He rose abruptly and walked to the other end of the coach, the rapid motion of the train swaying his figure with a tragic semblance.

His fellow-passenger was now thoroughly frightened. Could there be another face so like her own that a lover could detect no difference? Assuredly not! The man must be acting—a real actor, perhaps, amusing himself at her expense. The hot blood surged into her face, and she lifted her eyes and encountered those of the stranger, as he stood with his arms folded across the back of her chair. There was no mistaking the look in them, and she who read its meaning could compare it to nothing she had ever seen save the rapt expression of an enthusiast beneath the object of his inspiration. He seemed content to stand and look down at her in silence, and a strange fancy began to shape itself in her mind under the influ-

ence of those nigrescent gray eyes. Her companion was an idealist, a transcendentalist, a spiritual transmigrant; he had found in her a materialized ideal, and he imagined her mind and heart and soul attuned to a harmonious recognition of the tie between them without the jarring medium of social formalities. But could he also have imagined so material a circumstance as having taken her to see Irving, imagined for her a tangible personality in the character of Naida somebody, imagined—imagined! imagined! imagined! The word so carelessly uttered stuck to her tongue as did the Nessus-poisoned shirt to the back of tortured Hercules. Was it customary for sane young men, of even the most metaphysical tendencies, to go about assuming proprietorship of young ladies whose faces chanced to resemble their ideals? She had never heard of a sane man indulging his fancy to such an extent, but—

She thought of the long, unbroken run between her and her destination, and her heart and head, though usually brave and steady, whirled dizzily before the ominous array of possibilities that passed in momentary review.

"Naida," said he, without altering his position or betraying any emotion, "there is but one falsehood you could tell me that I should find hard to forgive, and that is that you do not love me. If a doubt of it should creep into my heart at this moment, do you know what I should do?"

A kind of fascinated curiosity impelled her to

lift her face to his, and she saw no pity in the eyes looking down at her with a flame in them that might be likened to the cold gleam of burnished steel.

"I would take you—so—," said he, encircling her slender throat with his long, sinewy, white fingers, "and strangle you." He gazed at her for a moment, then broke into a light laugh.

"Take that horrified look off your face; your pretty throat is in no danger from these fingers." He sat down on an impromptu seat of hassocks, took one knee in his embrace, and leaned back against the narrow ledge between the windows at an angle to bring his eyes on a level with the face directly in front of him. He talked to her for an hour, requiring and seeming to expect only an occasional monosyllable in reply. From tid-bits of news and gossip from the bohemian world in which he lived, he drifted into a discussion of art, thence to reminiscences of his student life abroad, his peculiar surroundings and associations the year he stole from college and spent at Rome; his father's anger therefor, and his own penance on a high stool at a desk in the great rambling warehouse, where the odor of the weed that had furnished him money to wander over the earth like a young prince irritated the nostrils that inhaled with enthusiasm the dust of old picture-galleries and foul odors of musty antiquities. There was nothing in his manner to frighten her; but now and then she was reminded of his strange fancy and her

own helplessness by terms of endearment that seemed to fall from his lips unconsciously, and by references to a future in which he strove with pathetic earnestness to enlist her sympathy.

Thus the remainder of the journey was traversed,—his eyes dwelling on her face in a sort of uncanny rapture, and hers mesmerically drawn to his face while she listened to him, studied him, and wondered if any girl ever before had such a strange adventure. She had ceased to watch the door for the reappearance of a porter or the conductor, and she gave up all idea of trying to escape across the sleet-covered platform into the next coach. Aside from the impracticability of this, she dreaded a scene; and, like any sensible, discreet girl whose worldly sophistication takes the form of independence, she did not have to think twice to decide between a sensation, and possible newspaper notoriety, and the companionship, for a half-hour or so, of a pleasant, entertaining stranger who bore the stamp of gentleman from the tip of his neat foot to the crown of his golden head, even though that auriferous surface might overlie a substratum of doubtful sanity.

"Do you feel no curiosity about my unexpected appearance?" he asked, breaking a prolonged silence.

Forgetful of her pseudo character she was about to reply, "None whatever!" but the expectant look in his eyes evoked a gentler answer. "The profoundest," she said with sudden sincerity.

"I wanted a bleak winter scene for a new landscape—but it will not interest you, will it?"

"Why not?" she asked quickly and curiously.

"You want everything all warmth and color—"

"Do I?" she interrupted in a contradictory tone, still unmindful of her mistaken or ideal identity with the unknown Naida.

"Most certainly you do."

"Most certainly I do not."

"Why then, Naida, did you oppose the medalion of yourself I begged for so earnestly? Your only excuse at the time was that medallions, like busts, are so cold and dead-looking."

"I never, to my knowledge—"

"Hush!" he said fiercely but tenderly, "don't perjure—" He controlled himself with an effort and continued in a natural voice: "Who is to meet you at the train?"

"My father."

"He is at home again, is he?"

"Yes," she said, giving him a puzzled, curious glance.

"I am resigned to my enforced absence for the next week," said he with a smile and a shrug. "You are sure your father will meet you?"

"Quite sure."

"Then I shall say good-by now; no need of facing disagreeable situations when one can turn one's back on them." He got up and stood by her chair with his hand resting on the back of it. She could see his eyes wandering from herself to

her reflection in the narrow mirror between the windows, then back again to linger wistfully upon the dark head throbbing beneath his light touch.

"This beautiful head is full of queer whims," he mused extenuatingly, "but the outside suits me, and that is enough. If you were more perfect I might lose you—and I would not risk that."

The hissing of the air-brakes and the slowing motion of the train marked the journey of these strange fellow-passengers as nearly ended.

"Good-by!" said he, revolving her chair so as to be able to look into her eyes, "good-by—my darling!" His lips touched hers for a moment, gently, reverentially, yet with a fervor that through life would leave its impress upon her heart, and then he was gone.

Shocked into almost insensibility, she sat there after every pulse had ceased to beat in the huge monster of transportation.

A young man—a boy, rather, with symptoms of manhood in dress and manners—came to the door, peered in, then rapidly advanced to her side. "Hello, Browné! asleep? Must have had a deucedly stupid trip, whole car to yourself—eh? what's the matter?"

"Hush-sh, Tom, he might hear you and come back. Just think of it! I have traveled miles and miles shut up here all alone with a *lunatic*!"

"Deuce take it, Browné, don't be mysterious, there is enough of that in our family!"

"Tom Mordeck, how dare you intimate—" she

checked herself and laughed in a constrained way—constrained indeed for a sister and brother discussing family affairs. “I do not think I have said how d’y’ do, have I?” and she kissed him affectionately.

They entered the carriage in waiting and were driven over to Michigan Avenue. The boulevard gained, and Gog and Magog given their heads, the carriage soon swerved with a dexterous flourish under a gray stone porte-cochère.

“Why did father not meet me?” she asked, with sudden recollection of what had been banished from her memory by the events of the past half-hour.

“He is not at home.”

“Where?”

“Usual place, I suppose.”

“Poor little mother!”

“Beg pardon?”

“Did I say anything?”

A footman held the door open for them to alight, and a wistful look into each other’s eyes was their only comment upon this curt and significant dialogue.

CHAPTER II.

THE Mordecks' home in Michigan Avenue did not differ essentially from a half-hundred other residences of millionnaires in the Windy City; and since, in this age and country of ephemeral "fads," descriptions are untrustworthy records, it is specializing enough to mention that the interior bore an elaborate and tasteful impress of the then prevalent Russomania.

No instantaneous photographic process would have been essential to the taking of the drawing-room scene the evening following Miss Mordeck's return; for Browné was a lazy, luxurious maiden when the occasion did not demand vivacity and animation, and her pose was as quiet and protracted as if designed for an artist's sitting. With the train of her white silk tea-gown, bordered with Labrador fur the exact brown of her eyes, properly disposed, she lay back in her chair with her brown slippered feet crossed in front of her on a small animal *couchant* very realistic in appearance. In an effort at consistency, for she was a Russo-maniac, she had pressed her wavy dark hair down over her forehead in the severely plain Russian bang; but Nature had revolted, and the result was a cluster of loose ringlets high up on either tem-

ple, with a graceful point down the middle of her smooth forehead,—a state of affairs, or rather of hair, certainly more in harmony with the Greek knot at the back of her head, which otherwise would have made her coiffure, like some modern architecture, “a design of mixed schools.”

To see her as she appeared in this gown, that was not only “the work of an artist but the inspiration of a genius,” as Fashion’s critic has decided a perfect tea-gown to be, one could easily understand the rapture with which an artist might regard her—more easily than when muffled in a long, close-fitting traveling coat, hat and gloves. Perhaps the same thought occurred to her, for she indolently surveyed herself in a wide mirror, and colored deeply as she became conscious of the wish that her transcendental admirer might see her as she saw herself at that moment.

Not so easily captured would have been Mrs. Mordeck’s picture. Had the artist possessed a revolving camera, perhaps after he had grown dizzy and the screw of his instrument had worn loose in its groove in his attempts to keep her in focus, he might have drawn his slide at random and received an impression of a pretty, matronly figure with a sweet face, large soft eyes and brown hair, a small foot put out to straighten the corner of a rug, and a plump, girlish hand raised to fleck a bit of dust or lint off a piece of bric-à-brac while the eyes wandered about the room taking in the alterations to be made in a fiftieth circuit. Such was Ethel

Mordeck,—a fussy, fidgety, incessant housekeeper. With a retinue of servants at her beck and call she worked from morning till night, and conversed peripatetically as she wandered from room to room or from one piece of furniture to another. Her children had learned to follow her with their eyes and to modulate their voices in speaking to her according to the intervening distance, Tom avowing that he had by this process developed a bari-tone of extraordinary compass. Only the presence of her calm, grave husband served as a quietus to the restless energy of her nature, and ever so light a touch of his hand sufficed to keep her at his side motionless, almost breathless, in the fullness of joy and contentment he brought into her life. But this evening she had not even the anticipation of his quieting presence to soothe her, and restlessness held full sway.

"Mamma, do sit down a moment," said Browné protestingly. "You will exhaust yourself before our first guest arrives. Come here and devote five minutes to me before we are separated for two weary, stupid hours."

Mrs. Mordeck laughed, and perched herself on the arm of her daughter's chair. With all her forty years she was younger in feelings and actions than was this calm, stately child of hers at twenty.

"Mamma, what is the end and aim of your existence?" inquired Browné with a protective smile.

"To love and be loved, and to make a beautiful, happy home for my husband and children."

"Then were hopes never more fully realized!"

"Yes; we are abundantly blessed and our happiness should be complete, but—"

"But we have our closeted skeleton as other people have!" interrupted Browné bitterly, not caring whether or not this was the conclusion her mother had intended, now that she had found courage to relieve her heart of the burden she had borne in silence since childhood.

"What do you mean by such words?" demanded Mrs. Mordeck in a frightened, startled tone, drawing away from her daughter and beginning a restless, nervous promenade.

"I mean that none of us know what takes papa away on these strange trips; and while we resent our ignorance, we live in constant dread of its being dispelled."

"There is no mystery, I am sure," remonstrated Ethel Mordeck faintly.

"Yes, there is a mystery, mamma!" exclaimed Browné passionately. "Do you or I or does Tom know what takes papa away from home, or when or where he is going, or how long he will be gone?"

"My daughter, your outburst is childish," said Mrs. Mordeck with a dignity that awed her daughter because of its unwontedness. "If your father were aware of your pettish curiosity he would no doubt gratify it."

"It isn't curiosity, mamma; I should be contented if I thought you understood these strange absences."

"Would you be satisfied, dear, to know that your mother knows all she wishes to know about the matter?"

"Yes, mamma."

"Then be content; I do!" said the wife loyally, while her lips grew pale at the falsehood that had passed them, and her conscience sneered: You lie! you know nothing, nothing! and her heart cried: I do not wish to know anything my husband desires to keep from me!

The first callers were announced, and the skeleton was pushed back into its closet and the key turned on it, while gay greetings and silvery laughter drowned the noise of clanking bones as it settled down in its seldom-visited retreat.

"Ah, Mrs. Van Montefort, don't tell me you had not heard of my return and that this visit was intended exclusively for mamma!" murmured Miss Mordeck with charming pathos—bathos it seemed to her—as she gracefully bore down upon the small lady who professed to be amazed beyond speech at seeing her, while in reality she was only stricken dumb with envy of the ravishing tea-gown of the beautiful Russomaniac.

"Will you drink a glass of my tea?" continued she, retreating toward the samovar and affording Mrs. Van Montefort the coveted back view she would have lingered the remainder of the evening to obtain. "Poor mamma makes a wry face at the very thought of it, but I am sure you will not decline when I whisper to you that you shall drink

it from a glass purloined from the Czar's own buffet by a Nihilistic admirer of mine—sh! not another question; I might get his head into a noose not of his own choosing."

"You may do so anyway, if rumor is correct," laughed Mrs. Van Montefort shrilly.

Miss Mordeck smiled slowly, and threw a comprehensive, satisfied glance about the room furnished, fitted and adorned *à la Russe*, and said with exasperating sang-froid:

"No one can blame me, I am sure; Alexandrovich Pavlonski is all I need to make my *gostinaya* complete."

This was an extreme of devotion to which poor little Mrs. Van M. could not aspire; for Van was still in the flesh, and, tractable as he had proven so far, he could not be expected, even for the sake of consistency, to abdicate in favor of a companion more *à la Russe*.

Other callers came, and put an end to Miss Mordeck's ironic avowals and Mrs. Van Montefort's envious credulity.

The occasion was a weekly reception at which Mrs. and Miss Mordeck were at home to their friends from four till six o'clock. An uninvited guest had been entertained in the earlier part of the evening, but no trace of his unwelcome presence was to be seen on the schooled faces of the hosts; and Browné's heart being a little bitter and her mood sarcastic, and her mind dwelling with aggravating persistency on her adventure of the day before,

she evoked the whispered observation from an alliterative admirer that "she was more wicked, witty and winsome than her wont." She provoked herself, perhaps, more than she did any one else. Why should a fair, earnest face be ever before her? If Clive Markham's eyes followed her with a devouring light, she shrugged her shoulders and thought of another pair of eyes that could have looked straight into hers and expressed a thousand times more without revealing aught to those about her; if Howard Jordan's small, effeminate hand trembled in receiving from her a glass of bitter tea until the thin slice of lemon quivered in its translucent bath, she thought of the long, sinewy fingers that encircled her throat without a tremor to betray their passionate purpose; if Arthur Gifford, impatient for the answer he had implored her not to give hastily, sought to withdraw her for a moment from her wide-eyed circle, then shrank from his purpose when attained, she thought of the calm, possessive way in which another had claimed her, and was straightway filled with contempt for all meek, humble and imploring lovers.

A few of the guests may have detected a nervous vivacity in Miss Mordeck's manner, but only her mother's eyes followed her with any anxiety. When the last caller had taken leave, Mrs. Mordeck pushed her daughter into a chair and seated herself on the arm of it.

"You have overtaxed yourself, my dear, I am

afraid—you positively bewildered me, and as for those poor deluded young men, they drank your horrid *à la Russe* tea as if it had been the most refreshing—”

“Vichy, let us say for illustration,” suggested the realist. “Some people, don’t you know, would imbibe a draught of Dead Sea water served to them *à la*—”

“Browné!”

“*A la Browné!* That is good, mamma; but I should never have been so egotistic as to originate it. Think of a new drink heralded to the public as ‘Dead Sea water *à la Browné Mordeck!*’ Mamma, we will send out cards immediately: Hours, ‘When graveyards yawn’; Refreshments, Dead Sea water and apples of Sodom. You dear inventive mamma!”

“My dear, I can’t imagine anything that could have made you so hilariously silly, unless you have been so foolish as to refuse Arthur Gifford and are trying to convince yourself you are glad of it.”

“Well, *madre mia*, that is exactly what I have done; and I wish I could as easily convince myself of some other things as I can that I am rejoiced at having ended that unfortunate affair.”

“Dear, dear!” sighed Mrs. Mordeck. “I cannot see what more could be desired in a young man than Arthur possesses,—rich, good-looking, moral, educated, well dressed—”

“Yes, yes, dear mamma! I know all that; and

the same can be said of Howard Jordan, Clive Markham, Tom Preston, Gene Goldweight and fifty others—they are all alike, there is no choice between them.”

Mrs. Mordeck sighed again and looked perplexed. “I am sure I cannot imagine what will be your fate.”

“Let’s try her fortune,” said Tom, drawing near the already doubly occupied chair and resting his elbows on the back of it: “‘Rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief; doctor, lawyer, merchant, chief’”; he began, counting the stones in the crescent semicircling the Grecian knot of Browné’s hair; “sick man, well man, athlete, rheumatic; feeble-minded, imbecile, crank or lunatic.”

“Tom, is your tie not a little—er—*passé*?”

“This, this tie *passé*? Why, girl, it is the very latest thing out! It is worn by—” and Tom launched forth into a voluble disquisition upon this particular line of haberdasher ingenuity, and forgot the momentous question left undecided.

His sister listened with a smile on her face and with a semblance of profound interest, while her thoughts ran riot and chased off the field every past, present and possible suitor, and left field, thoughts and all in possession of her lunatic lover. Oh! was there ever anything so absurd, so preposterous! She had heard of girls, in a fit of enthusiasm, yielding up their hearts to exiles, convicts, even condemned criminals; but—to a lunatic!

While Tom's eloquence waxed and Browné's contentment waned, Mrs. Mordeck was putting in order the sadly demoralized room. She shifted chairs, hassocks and rugs; draped the silken hangings to open up a better view of the wide hall, with its central spreading stairway, and the salon beyond; changed, counterchanged, interchanged, exchanged and changed back again every movable piece of furniture and bric-à-brac in the room, and only paused in her ceaseless rounds when dinner was announced.

The dining room was magnificent, the appointments perfect, the *menu* elaborate, but there was an Egyptian skull at the feast, and appetites lagged and eyes wandered in silent wistfulness to the vacant chair and unappropriated plate.

"Bryan, remove papa's plate and chair—perhaps we shant miss him so much," Miss Mordeck ordered, and turned toward her mother beseeching eyes that implored the indulgence of her whim.

"Yes, Bryan, you may—"

"Leave them," supplemented a soft, deep voice, followed by various exclamations and general confusion, the most marked of which was an overturned chair and a glad, girlish cry of:

"Father, father, you!"

CHAPTER III.

JOY had waved her magic wand over the Mordeck home, and the skeleton had not only been shut within its closet, but the existence of that dark corner forgotten. The dinner begun in depressing silence ended in happy hilarity, as many a convivial feast has done before; but it was not champagne that had brought that tender, contented look into Mrs. Mordeck's pretty, matronly face, nor was it wine of any sort—save of pressed joyousness from youthful, happy hearts—that glowed from Browne's dark eyes and shone from Tom's blue ones and loosed both their tongues in the gay chatter so delightful to the grave, silent father.

That there was something of mystery about Thomas Mordeck no one, from his oldest friend to his most recent acquaintance, felt the least doubt. His past was an unread book; but whether it was so from being forbidden or merely because no one had ever had the temerity to ask for a perusal, was problematic. He indulged in no reminiscences, claimed relationship with none of the world's inhabitants save his wife and children, and acknowledged no existence previous to the hour he fell in love with Ethel Browne twenty-five years

before. As to nationality, he might have been an Anglicized Italian, or an Italianized Englishman, or merely an American with mixed ancestry. In appearance he was tall, well built, with a massive head gracefully poised on a neck that joined, with a muscular, curving expansion, broad, square shoulders. His hair and mustache were iron-gray, white predominating in the former, black in the latter; his eyes were black, large, deep-set and shadowed, not circled, and his lashes curved upward toward a lined forehead over which his hair fell in negligent abundance. His dress was always neat, loose-fitting, tending toward angularity in effect, and of dark, usually black, cloth. A silk hat, immaculate linen, and a severe simplicity in the minor details of his dress, made up his unvarying costume.

The resemblance between father and daughter was very striking as he held Browné on his knee and let his large white hand wander caressingly over the soft fur of her dainty tea-gown, and occasionally let his head drop to one side to rub his cheek against the arm encircling his neck.

"Papa, why did you not come to meet me, as you promised?" pouted Browné with a childishness she indulged in only when on her father's knee.

His habitual pallor deepened perceptibly at her question, but his face was moving with gentle friction against the fur-bordered sleeve in apparent enjoyment of the titillation, and his voice was free from emotion as he replied:

"I was called away unexpectedly, or I should have kept my promise."

"Yes, I know, of course! but who or what is this troublesome person or business that is always calling you away at such inconvenient times?"

Browné was a little frightened at her own petulant temerity, and avoided the eyes she felt instinctively there would be no smile in; but she was not prepared for the gentle, decisive repulse her curiosity met with. Mr. Mordeck pushed her from his knee, and arose and crossed the room to where his wife stood with the top of a potpourri jar suspended literally, as was her breath figuratively, while she awaited the answer to the question she had not dared to ask in more than a score of unenlightened years.

The skeleton was not to be buried as yet, however, and Mr. Mordeck resorted to no mock or temporary interment of it. He pinioned his wife's arms behind her with playful tenderness, as if a thoughtless hand had not almost touched the spring of the trap beneath his feet, and smiled gravely down into the face that was scarcely less fresh and pretty than the one he had fallen in love with twenty-five years before and claimed for his own four years later.

"I am sure, my systematic little wife, it is too late for any more callers this evening, and you will have ample time in the morning to remove all traces of to-night's invasion of your realm of perfection."

The forced smile had died away from his lips ere he ceased speaking, for his wife's blue eyes were uplifted to his face with a look in them he had never seen there before. It was not doubt nor mistrust, but mute, pathetic entreaty. He bowed his head till his cheek rested against hers, and his voice was a prayer as he murmured scarcely above a whisper :

"Ethel, for God's sake trust me! I cannot tell you my secret."

Ethel Mordeck was not a woman to whom would be attributed any special strength of character, grandeur of soul, or any of those transcendental qualities that impel women to immortalizing deeds; she was simply an adoring wife and a devoted mother, and her life was consecrated to the happiness of husband and children, by whom she was regarded as a household fairy to be petted, caressed, protected and worshiped for the brightness that followed in her wake; yet at this supreme moment her love was a stronger defense to her husband than would have been the moral courage of a Volumnia or the physical courage of a Grace Darling. The confirmed suspicion of an unsharable secret would have weakened many a stronger character, but in this instance it served to strengthen a dependent nature; and though her lips trembled beneath her husband's imploring kiss, her eyes smiled reassuringly into his, and he realized that the jewel he had placed on his breast as an ornament had become a shield to him in the hour of danger.

She allowed herself to be led back in affectionate captivity to the seat lately vacated by her daughter, and the safe anchoring in the domestic harbor after the brief tossing on treacherous waters loosened Tom's and Browné's tongues from the awed silence of the few minutes past.

Thomas and Ethel Mordeck's children never wearied of hearing of the thread of romance Fate slipped into the woof of their parents' lives,—their first short meeting, instant love, immediate separation, years of silence and fidelity while war devastated the land and blood flowed on the field and hearts bled at home in ignorance and suspense—never wearied of the story of the pretty heiress waiting for the return of a poor soldier lover whom she had met, loved and parted with, all in one evening; and Mr. Mordeck found it necessary to interpose, by way of a styptic to a stream of oft-repeated questions:

"Tom, who is your sister's latest victim?"

"Her latest is an M.D. from Indianapolis, and, if I mistake not, he will have something to do to keep his own pulse normal during the next fortnight."

"You—ah—mean by that, my son, that he is pondering a weighty—"

"No, sir; he is waiting for sister to ponder whether or not she can ever consent to be—"

"A Hoosier!" supplemented Browné, since division of labor seemed to be the conversational policy in the present dialogue.

"A Hoosier? from a Russomaniac to a Hoosier! O, what a fall was there, my countrymen!" exclaimed Mr. Mordeck with a gay, ringing laugh that startled his wife and children as nothing short of Gabriel's trumpet would have done. His face flushed beneath the wondering looks bent upon him, and he arose and strode through the long vista of semi-lighted rooms, back to the dining-room, whither his wife followed him and received an ocular verification of a long-fought suspicion.

He took a decanter of wine from the buffet and drained glass after glass. Espying her in the doorway, he hurled the empty goblet at her with a strength born of a sudden, inexplicable passion; but no sooner had the fragile missile left his hand and been caught noiselessly among the silken folds of the portière than he had his wife in his arms and was imploring her forgiveness. Tender, passionate words burst from his lips, and she listened in awe to the fervent avowals with which she had never been wooed; and her capricious woman's heart was rejoicing over the violent act that had invoked such penitence, when he called her softly by a name that was not her own and which she had never before heard him utter.

A sharp, wounded cry escaped her and brought her children in terror upon the scene. Their fear was not lessened by their father's brushing unheedingly past them with his small burden and laying her on a couch, by the side of which he

kneelt in cruel silence, deaf to their entreating questions and piteous cries.

Gazing on their father's strangely flushed face and their mother's marble-like one, only one explanation suggested itself to the frantic children,—their mother was dead and their father was mad from grief.

When Dr. Garrard entered the distracted home, summoned by the only servant not totally bereft of presence of mind, he felt almost helpless amidst the numerous demands made upon him. A few affectionate, reassuring words sufficed, however, to transform Browné into an able assistant, and Tom was sent post-haste to a drug store with a hurriedly scrawled prescription. Two able-bodied servants were peremptorily ordered to get their master to bed, and then Dr. Garrard set about reviving Mrs. Mordeck from her prolonged swoon. Attaining this result in a very short time, he left her in the care of Browné and a maid and proceeded to Mr. Mordeck's room.

An angry scowl rested on Dr. Garrard's face as he thumped up the wide stairs and stamped along the beautiful hall, the thick carpet giving back no sound. He was thoroughly indignant, and took this inoffensive way of venting his feelings.

"I have suspected this for a long time," he muttered in his beard, "but I credited him with too much pride to get so beastly drunk."

Far into the night he sat by the bedside, refusing to let wife, children or servants share his vigil,

lest his old friend's disgrace should be suspected. Toward morning the effect of the wine began to wear off; but the pulse bounded, the temperature rose, incoherent mutterings broke the silence, and Dr. Garrard examined his patient and began to look grave. He summoned a servant and bade her call Mrs. Mordeck, who had recovered from her swoon but refused to take other rest than on a couch, so as to be within easy reach in case she was needed.

Together these two watched during the remainder of the night; and many glances of questioning curiosity and wistful, pathetic inquiry were exchanged by the bedside of the delirious man as he raved of persons, places and things that were unfamiliar to either of his listeners. For forty-eight hours Ethel Mordeck was shut out from her husband's life. He was wandering in a past in which she had no part. Time and time again had he whispered, murmured, or shouted the name that had stricken her heart into unconsciousness, and each time she winced as at a fresh wound.

When at the close of the second day he opened his eyes and softly called "Ethel!" she bent over him with the passionate gladness of a prayed-for reunion; and Dr. Garrard dedicated to her a silent panegyric upon the strength and sublimity of loving wifehood.

CHAPTER IV.

MISS MORDECK had little time to devote to romantic conjectures about her crazy admirer in the week that followed. Her father's convalescence was marked by a nervous depression which exacted the constant companionship of her mother, consequently all social and household duties devolved upon her unaccustomed shoulders.

There was a strange reticence in the manner of both her mother and Dr. Garrard in regard to this illness of her father's that pained and puzzled her; and her mind would not have been greatly relieved by the knowledge that the reticence was caused by ignorance on the part of one and uncertainty on ~~the~~ part of the other. Dr. Garrard admitted to himself that he did not understand the case at all. He had been unable to decide whether the excessive wine-drinking had been the effect or the cause of the illness. That Mr. Mordeck was stupidly intoxicated when he first saw him he hadn't a doubt; but what his condition was immediately prior to this there was no means of ascertaining satisfactorily. His wife admitted that he had not been quite natural throughout the evening; that he had been more restless and excited than she

had ever seen him; that he had laughed aloud—which was a thing so extraordinary as to startle her and their children—and that he had thrown the wine-glass at her while his lips were yet moist with the contents of it, so that his frenzy could not have been from drunkenness.

Dr. Garrard had long suspected that these periodical disappearances of his old friend and patient might be for the purpose of indulging a weakness of which he would naturally desire to keep his family in ignorance; but, on the other hand, it was very difficult to persuade himself that a man of Thomas A. Mordeck's standing, executive ability and power in finance, and with his high standard of morality, could yield to such a debauching weakness. The most unanswerable argument that assailed the doctor was that Mr. Mordeck, while he evinced by every word and act an acceptance of Christianity, refused to identify himself with the church. He was regular at services, liberal, charitable, a strict observer of Lent, and in everything was a consistent Christian so far as the world knew; but what sin, or whether any sin, was committed during those mysterious absences to mar an otherwise perfect life and to shut him out from a conscientious public avowal of worthiness to stand in God's ranks, the doctor could not see his way to decide.

During an early morning call toward the last of his professional visits, Dr. Garrard remarked jocularly:

"Well, Mordeck, has your impromptu detective force succeeded in finding that key?"

"The key? ah, that nightmare! Only think, Garrard, after my poor little wife had suffered her house to be turned topsy-turvy in search of it, Bryan discovered it in the pocket of a castaway vest. You need not laugh; I was compelled to have that key whatever the cost of finding it. I haven't the remotest idea what it unlocks; but in my delirium there seemed to be a hundred frightful places it would have released me from. I do not know how long I have had the key in my possession or how it ever came there; but it has proven itself a talisman against horrible dreams, terrible dilemmas and nightmares in general, and I shall never again voluntarily be without it."

The key in question was a short skeleton one, deeply serrated, the notches enlarging as they approached the ring, which was an ellipse with a carved periphery of microscopic death's heads.

It had been a source of considerable curiosity to Mr. Mordeck's family and friends and of avowed mystery to himself; but henceforth it would be an object of peculiar fear and reverence to him, while his wife shuddered at the mere sight of it and felt, though unadmitted even to herself, that it could unlock the closet that contained their unrevealed skeleton.

As Dr. Garrard came down the broad stairs he saw Browné at the foot of them, leaning against the newel, her motionless figure serving as a beau-

tiful caryatid for the basket of cut flowers just above her head. He paused and took a fragrant, half-blown rose from the hospitable basket, and while he fastened it in his buttonhole he narrowly scanned her face.

"Where are the roses from here and here?" he asked, touching either cheek with friendly, familiar fingers, "and wherefore this listless attitude? Come, let me bowl you over the boulevard a mile or two in chase of the truants."

"Thank you, Doctor; but I do not care to go out."

"That is precisely the reason, my dear girl, that you should do so. Go, make yourself irresistible in that sealskin ulster and bewitching cap that hides all these curls except a little dark angle down the middle of this white forehead, and promenade State Street and play havoc with the boys' hearts. That is a delightful little cutter you have, with its gay pompons nodding and bobbing, and you look very charming nestled down in its furry depths, but what you need just now is a brisk walk; so take my advice or you may have to take something worse."

Browné laughed at the doctor's descriptive outburst, and promised to follow his prescription. She made herself irresistible after the manner advised, and started forth upon a constitutional without limit, boundary or goal.

After a brisk walk of many blocks, varied by a car ride of as many more, she found herself on the

North Side, in the neighborhood of Lincoln Park. She could see the merry skaters skimming over the small frozen lakes, and could hear their gay laughter breaking through the crisp, invigorating air. A wild, impetuous spirit took possession of her feet and led her into the park, up to the frozen edge of the lake, as a gambler's feverish impulse takes him to the table without volition or consciousness; and there, without skates, she stood gazing wistfully out over the coruscated surface, as would the gambler, without money, watch the balls of alternating colors. A Cupid without arrows, a Mercury without wings, a Pegasus in harness, she stood thinking of what might have been and what was, and exclaimed aloud in her impatient longing:

"Oh, for a pair of skates!"

"My mission in life is to gratify your every wish," said an amused voice at her elbow, as a pair of new skates fell across her arm. "Sit down and let me put them on you."

Of course she recognized her eccentric admirer and fellow-passenger of a fortnight before, and she was also conscious of a sensation not wholly of fear as he knelt at her feet, fitting on the skates that certainly must have been bought for her foot and no other.

"There, they fit perfectly! Try them a few turns while I am putting on mine."

She arose and stood for a moment, trembling so, that, from his half-kneeling position, he put out

a hand to steady her. His fingers closed over her elbow, causing her hand to drop upon his shoulder; and with it resting there she began to realize her situation,—in an unwonted part of the city, among strangers, and with a mysterious, unknown companion who wielded an influence over her which was betraying her into romantic escapades and irresolute conduct which the Browné Mordeck of a fortnight ago would have condemned relentlessly. She was suddenly filled with terror and a wild longing to flee.

Snatching her hand from his shoulder, as one releasing the sponge when an electric current is too strong, she sped away like some dainty, winged creature skimming close to a watery surface and dipping now and then for pleasure and not from necessity.

A hundred merry skaters dotted the lake iridescently, and her wild flight was unnoted save by a few who paused to admire her skill and grace; and these few merely smiled in sympathy or envy as a second and evidently pursuing figure darted past them with excelling swiftness and ease.

The race was short but spirited, and as he caught her hand and drew her beside him in a slackening curve, he smiled and exclaimed, slightly winded:

"Ah, you humbug! When and where did you learn to skate that way? and why have you been deceiving me?"

A sudden darkness enveloped Browné, and she

held out her hands with piteous helplessness. He took them in his and guided her to a seat; and while he chafed them gently he uttered tender, reassuring words, believing her indisposition to be temporary and from over-exertion.

But she was conscious of nothing save the tumult in her own heart. She had been deluding herself with the belief that her rival was merely an ideal in a brain incapable of distinguishing between the real and the imaginary; but this reference to former skating expeditions, his preparation and evident engagement for the present one, opened her eyes to a possibility which blinded her with its glare of reasonableness.

It was not her fault that she had deceived him thus far, and, humiliating as it would be, she determined to try again to convince him of his mistake. She lifted her eyes suddenly, looked straight into his, and said beseechingly:

"Please, please look at me earnestly and tell me I have never willfully deceived you."

He frowned and compressed his lips; but a smile soon replaced the look of annoyance as his eyes came back from a brief excursion over her seal-clad figure and rested with feasting scrutiny on her exquisite face.

"Naida, why make such an unreasonable demand? You know that I, of all people, could not fail to discover your one fault. It is inexplicable to me, I admit, and I deplore it from the depths of my heart; but ten thousand such faults could

not change you in my eyes so long as you possess a face that has power to draw me to Heaven or Hades. All who see one single face and form, dressed as my fancy pleases, looking down upon me from walls, easel and pedestal in my studio, realize that I worship my model whoever she may be. It is absurd of you to fret about this one blemish in an otherwise perfect creation, to try to blind me to it instead of endeavoring to erase it."

How happily sometimes may chance bits of information be fitted into the mosaic of our experiences. Browné Mordeck recalled the history of the portrait painter, Blake, and recognized in her artist lover another overwrought genius who could conjure up before him his model with such vividness as to render it impossible for his diseased brain to distinguish between the fancied and the real. To this inability to distinguish between her actual and her imagined presence, her actual and her imagined sayings and doings, could be directly traced his ineradicable belief in her untruthfulness. How pardonable, then, was his distrust, and how pardonable was the elation that possessed her!

With her corporeal rival disposed of, and only a dual self to maintain as consistently as was possible with the vagaries of his imagination to contend against, she gave herself up to the unique joy of bestowing a pure and sacrificial love upon the man whom an unreadable destiny had designed as the complement of her life.

"Are you angry with me, Naida?"

"Angry with you?" she repeated vacantly; then with strategy born of keen anxiety and curiosity: "Oh no! I was merely wondering if you could cut your name with your skates."

"Your memory is shorter than usual, it seems," he said good-humoredly, and fell to tracing his name in slow, legible characters on the ice.

"Shreves Chilson," she read aloud, and breathed rather than spoke her grateful "Thank you!"

Apropos of nothing specially, unless of her sleek-coated figure, he observed presently:

"I believe I will paint you next as Actæon transformed by Diana's rage and pursued by his own hounds. The hunted look in your eyes as you turned them over your shoulder and saw me gaining upon you would fit nicely into the head of the poor bayed stag. Besides, it would be a unique use of my model," he added, with a fond possessive glance.

"What was I last?" she inquired carelessly, while her heart beat expectantly and her ears were acutely alive to the answer that was to reveal something of his imagined associations with herself, or his associations with her imagined self.

"Have you forgotten so soon? I am sure we had trouble enough—and pleasure too, did we not, Naida—in twining the wreaths about your head and shoulders and decking you out for your watery grave."

"I was Ophelia,—oh, yes!" exclaimed she with

animation. "You will show me the picture some time, will you not?"

"To-morrow, if you will come to my studio."

"I—I couldn't to-morrow; papa—"

"Is the *pater* at home again?"

A cold gleam shot from Miss Mordeck's eyes at the disrespectful tone and manner of speaking of her idolized father, and she said haughtily:

"My father has returned, yes."

"Rather unexpected, wasn't it? His absences are usually more prolonged."

"I don't know what you mean!" exclaimed she, indignant tears springing to her eyes, and a consciousness of prevarication to shield her father cutting short her denial.

"Yes you do, Naida," said he, laying his hand on hers with tender firmness under cover of the disused muff that lay like a friendly barrack between her and the public gaze. "It is apparent to the blindest that these periodical disappearances and reappearances of your father are, to say the least, peculiar."

Browné Mordeck sat literally stunned beneath these quiet words of an utter stranger—words that had never until very lately been given voice to even in the privacy of her own home. That he should know all about herself, even to the number of skate she wore, had ceased to cause her wonder, accounting for it as she did by some sixth sympathetic sense; but when he discussed in a commonplace tone a subject mentioned with bated

breath by herself, she began to fear the result of her imprudence, and longed to escape from the presence and influence of this strange, masterful man.

"Take off my skates, please; I want to go home."

"What, so soon? We have—"

Despite remonstrance she was soon walking toward an exit from the park, with Shreves Chilson as an attentive but silent companion.

As they gained the sidewalk she hailed a passing car.

"Are you going to ride?" he asked in surprise.

"Certainly. I walked over here in a dream, but the effects are painfully real."

"You are a lazy body, my Naida; but not half so lazy as perverse. Walk with me, please."

She shook her head. "I can't; I must go home; papa wants me."

"I can't flatter myself he is in the same emotional condition toward me, so I shall have to say *au revoir*, I suppose."

She smiled a friendly, but perplexed, good-by from the car window, and wondered if his quiet acceptance of her arbitrary leave of him was because of her evident desire to get away, or because in his imaginary association with herself he was accustomed to sudden and unaccountable disappearances.

CHAPTER V.

BROWNÉ came down to breakfast unrefreshed by her night's sleep, in consequence of a fatiguing journey through dreamland. This land, though an autocracy, has a chameleon-like tendency to adapt its appearance to the mood of the tourist, and it therefore cannot be wondered at that the whole realm seemed to her to be peopled with lunatics—lunatics in the romantic, poetic sense of the word, as victims of beautiful, baleful Luna. Like the world's in general, Miss Mordeck's ideas of insanity were vague, shadowy and shuddering. The term, dethroned reason, meant to her the former possession of a gigantic intellect. Excitement, mental tension, or overwhelming disappointment was the ready diagnosis in all the cases in her imagination. She could not conceive of a monotonous, drudging routine producing the awesome catastrophe which, like gout, is thought to be an ill the mental Crœsi alone are heir to. Hence, in her dreamland wanderings she had met a number of Hamlets, a few Lears, innumerable Ophelias, one or two suicidal Ludwigs, poets, geniuses, and countless victims of love.

With this romantic, refined and artistic view of insanity, she could not be expected to feel that

repulsive fear of her crazy lover that a better acquaintance with the daily papers would have given her; and the course she was pursuing, which under other circumstances would have seemed to her highly improper, and her repeated adventure a thing to be prevented by the police, became not only excusable, but was metamorphosed into a natural and delicate consideration for the strange, pathetic hallucination that imposed a sacred duty upon her. Exactly what that duty was she had been unable to decide. She knew so little about insanity and its treatment that she was harassed by grave doubts whether it were best to humor his delusion or to endeavor to convince him of it.

She grew a little cold at the recollection of her two vain efforts at the latter method, but immediately felt a warm reaction as her heart suggested a gentle, hitherto untried means. She would not deny her identity with Naida, but would explain to him how he had given that name to his ideal before he had met that ideal in the form of Browné Mordeck; and now that his heart's dream had become a reality, he must give up both name and ideal for the actual love and loving woman.

The warm blood rushed into her face and her heart beat tumultuously at this unpremeditated self-confession; and when she recalled the only lover's kiss that had ever pressed her lips, mistaken though she thought it at the time, and lived over the rapture of the moments she sat a passive, spellbound listener to words such as had never, in

all the adulation that had been poured into her ears, been spoken to her—words tender, possessive, eloquent—when memory dwelt upon these scenes, Browné experienced a mystic exaltation that possesses an enthusiast under the influence of genius; and for the moment she lived, moved, and had her being in a sphere far removed from her physical surroundings.

Mrs. Mordeck, not aware of her daughter's spiritual flight, laid a smooth, cold object against her cheek and bent her head back for a morning caress. Browné started and uttered a faint exclamation.

"Why, my child, how nervous you are!" said Mrs. Mordeck in alarm. "You have been too closely confined; you must go out more."

"It is nothing, mamma; only the letter was cold and my face warm." She sawed open the envelope with a long pin from her hair, commenting as she did so: "Something especial must have evoked a second letter from Lilian; she is usually a strict observer of the mosaic law in her correspondence, demanding an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth."

"Lilian" was a modish young creature, as revealed by scented monogrammed stationery and a straight, dashing hand which might be termed chirography, but certainly not calligraphy.

Browné glanced at the beginning of the letter, and dropped it with an exclamation.

"What is it, dear?"

"Bryan said papa would take breakfast with us this morning, and I had forgotten to see about the temperature of the room."

"I have already attended to that, of course!" said Ethel Mordeck, with a touch of usurped prerogative in her voice.

"Of course!" smiled her tall daughter, stooping for a forgiving kiss. "I will accept the unconscious certainty as an excuse for my thoughtlessness."

Mr. Mordeck came in at this juncture, leaning on the arm of his man; his "man" only temporarily, however, as Thomas A. Mordeck would as soon have owned a poodle as a valet. Parks would resume his livery when his two strong, skillful arms were needed by Gog and Magog more than by his respected master. Wife and daughter advanced with affectionate welcome but without any effusion, and no recollection of the glass he had thrown at his wife's head a fortnight before in the adjoining room marred Mr. Mordeck's pleasure at this reunion with his family.

"Where is Tom?" he inquired.

"I told him breakfast would be later than usual, and he went for a ride," said Mrs. Mordeck. "I think I hear him in the lower hall now."

A boyish tenor rang through the house in a "catchy" strain of a new opera, and was accompanied by a three-step stride up the stairs, both voice and step suddenly ending in a sick-room approach.

"Never mind that, my boy," said Mr. Mordeck,

in a voice that was always quiet but seldom gloomy. "I am an invalid no longer. You seem to have put Black Prince through."

"I did indeed, father; and I wish I could share with you the color and appetite that are the result of it."

"Tom, you are a nice boy, full of pretty speeches, and I predict for you immense popularity with the girls," announced his sister with lazy affection, as she changed her luxurious attitude so far as to be able to glance at him over her shoulder.

Tom noted her unusual pallor, and strode over to the back of her chair.

"Upon second thought, I believe I will share my color with you," he said, tilting her back with fraternal roughness and rubbing his glowing young cheek against hers.

Mr. and Mrs. Mordeck exchanged glances full of proud, happy meaning; and a looker-on would never have suspected a skeleton in the closet of this perfect household.

Browné withdrew to her room immediately after breakfast, and reopened her friend's letter with nervous haste. She read rapidly, excitedly:

"BOWLING GREEN, Ky., Friday, January 21st.

"MY DEAREST BROWNÉ:—

"I have had *such* an adventure! a *crazy* man fell in love with me! He is now in the asylum, poor fellow! convicted and sent there on the conclusive evidence just given.

"Not to add ambiguity to mystery I will give you a brief account of the romantic affair, and leave your imagination to fill in the gaps of the indescribable, inexplicable and inexpressible.

"My admirer was (I say *was* because the asylum walls are assuredly a sarcophagus to my romance in that quarter) a perfect little Adonis, with big, melting, brown eyes, black wavy hair, and dainty curling mustache that was wholly inadequate to conceal the scarlet lips and the pearly rows of teeth that made one feel as if it would be a positive delight to be bitten by them. *That* was before I knew all—ugh!

"Well, not to anticipate, the first I knew of the affair, papa came in last Friday morning—papa is an awfully stern, unjoking and peculiar sort of man, you know—and told me there was a young man down at the hotel avowing quite frankly and publicly that he was engaged to Miss Lilian Atherton, and that we were to be married before Christmas. He had in his possession a number of my pictures, and rhapsodized over them until he awakened jealousy in the bosoms of some of my swains—that must have been the way of it—for somebody notified papa. My enraged parent was advancing like a Goliath upon the handsome little David, when a pebble, in the shape of a subdued remark from a physician standing by, caused his hand to drop to his side and him to stand there before the smiling lad conquered. The remark was to the effect that the young man was crazy, and was babbling things that were simply delusions with him.

"The doctor asked permission to bring him into my presence, to see whether or not he would forsake his photographs for the original (I can't imagine how he got possession of the pictures unless

at the photographer's), and also to ascertain whether or not I had ever met him.

"The time for the interview arrived. I, of course, had been thinking about it until my nerves were at the highest tension, and mamma fidgeted about the room with tears of fear and anxiety in her eyes, and papa looked stern and uncompromising if there should turn out to be any 'developments', and the doctor smiled at me reassuringly and gave the signal for admittance.

"The young man was an utter stranger to me; and, to my horror and the doctor's surprise, he turned to the gentleman accompanying him, and gave him my pictures, saying:

"'There, you may have them now; I have found her.'

"He came toward me quietly, without the least trace of excitement in his manner, and said with the utmost deference:

"'You sent for me, Lily; are we to be married this morning?'

"I rushed to the sofa, flung myself on it and burst into tears. He followed quickly and knelt beside me and talked oh, just beautifully! He looked so handsome and his voice was so pleading and his words so tender and beseeching that I hadn't the heart to rudely dispel his illusions, and—and—besides, I think I was rapidly falling in love with him—and in a few minutes more I should certainly have made a fool of myself, when all at once he fell back on the floor in a most horrible *fit*—ugh!

"They took him to the asylum and me to bed, and that was the end of my romance.

"I can't write commonplaces after the above. Good-by!

"Your affectionate and somewhat sobered

"LIL."

Browné remained inactive for some time after finishing Lilian Atherton's letter. A shudder now and then was the only thing to indicate the line of her thought. Insanity had been presented to her in a new phase; she had never thought of this mental disease in the physical form of epileptic fits, one of which she had seen in her lifetime and which she recalled with a repulsive thrill; and this new, pitiless light thrown upon this most terrible of human afflictions, divesting it of all romance and clothing it with repulsion, filled her with a vague, chilling horror. In spite of a desperate effort to shut out the sight her overwrought imagination conjured up before her, she dwelt with persistent fascination upon the fancied form of Shreves Chilson groveling at her feet, his eyes protruding, his lips blue and froth-stained, his limbs quivering and distorted, his hair disheveled and his nature robbed of every thought, feeling and emotion of the divine body in whose similitude he was made.

"Heaven help me if such a curse is indeed upon him!" she whispered with anguish unmingled with loathing.

That this repulsive vision brought no disenchantment was strong proof that the feeling in her heart for Shreves Chilson was love, and not romantic fancy fostered by extraordinary circumstances.

Her resolve was speedily taken. Fate had mapped out a peculiar path for her feet, but she must not blunder along it ignorantly; and as, ow-

ing to the unparalleled nature of her duty, she could go to no one for advice, she determined to seek guidance and information from a source that would excite neither curiosity nor criticism. She dressed herself, walked over to Indiana Avenue, took a car, and went down to the Public Library.



CHAPTER VI.

WHEN Miss Mordeck entered the library she found it necessary to fall in line and await her turn at the desk besieged by applicants for books.

Either the unfamiliarity of her surroundings or the strangeness of her mission gave her a look of nervous consciousness that attracted the attention of a young man in her immediate rear. He was society reporter for one of the leading dailies and knew Miss Mordeck by sight. Her air of uneasiness set him to conjecturing as to her object there, and he decided that she was in search of a style of literature not represented in her own library—which decision was confirmed by her writing something on a slip of paper and handing it to the librarian.

In doing so it fluttered from her nervous fingers; and the reporter, with a smile of worldly experience and cynicism, stooped for it and politely returned it to her.

He had not intended to glance at it, but it lay writing upward on the polished floor, and adhered to the smooth surface as if magnetically attracted, necessitating several ineffectual attempts to get

hold of it and making it impossible to blind his eyes to the large, legible characters. He handed it to her, apologizing for his awkwardness, and turned away wondering what the deuce an offspring of Cræsus and Fashion could want with "Some good treatise on insanity."

After a short absence the librarian returned with an armful of huge volumes. He pushed them toward her, and said she "might find something in all of them."

"How large they are!"-she exclaimed in a dismayed undertone, glancing from the books to the only vacant table at the far end of the room.

"Allow me to put them on the table for you," said the reporter with grave civility, and Miss Mordeck accepted his services without noting his excessive eagerness to render them.

Spitzka, Falret, Hammond, Clouston and other distinguished authorities on mental diseases caught his eye as he deposited the heavy volumes on the table; and as he lifted his hat and walked away, he wondered what society would say if it were informed that the beautiful Miss Mordeck's latest fancy was the study of insanity.

Browné gazed at the pile of books before her, uncertain where or how to begin in the task she had set herself, and coming to the dismal conclusion that there must be a great deal of insanity in this world or a great many kinds of it.

Before she had concluded her first dip into psychological lore she began to wonder that so

many people had escaped incarceration in lunatic asylums.

Where there is a will there is a way, is a rule that works with more or less facility in every human purpose; and Miss Mordeck, bent on an investigation of the subject of epilepsy, soon discovered from the index to what pages of the volumes to turn.

After a great deal of futile and unsatisfactory reading, first in this book, then in that, she settled upon Hammond as the most satisfactory, and concluded to limit her investigation for the present to what he had to say on the subject, determining that wonder and fascination should not prevent an impartial comparison of facts and the theories. Before she had gone far or again become lost in a maze of *petit mal*, *grand mal*, *traumatism* and other technicalities, she discovered in a peculiar phase of the disease known as *epilepsie larvée* (masked epilepsy) a form more explanatory of the case of Lilian's crazy lover than anything she had yet come across. Carefully and with deep interest she read the many strange and romantic instances cited, dwelling with a student's eagerness upon the pathology of each case, and becoming more and more assured of the correctness of her theory in regard to her own and Lilian's insane admirers.

A collateral reference in connection with this phase of epilepsy turned her attention to the subject of hallucinations; and having by this time become initiated in the proper method of pursuing

her investigation, she set about learning first the psychological distinction between the terms, illusion, hallucination and delusion, before studying the particular cases under any one of them.

"'An illusion,'" read she with slow emphasis, "'is a false perception of a real sensorial impression'—for instance, if there is a real Naida, and Shreves Chilson continued to mistake me for her after my denial and after a prolonged interview with me, he was certainly laboring under an optical illusion; for it is hardly possible, and highly improbable, that two people, strangers to each other, should look alike, dress alike, talk alike, act alike, and be so identical in every respect as to deceive one bearing the relation that Shreves Chilson does to the problematic Naida."

She derived much comfort from the qualifying "problematic," and dismissed the subject of illusions with a sigh of relief. She next took up hallucinations.

"'A hallucination is a false perception without any material basis,'" read she carefully, "'and is, therefore, centric in its origin. It is more, therefore, than an erroneous interpretation of a real object, for it is entirely formed by the mind. An individual, who on looking at a blank wall perceives it to be covered with pictures, has a hallucination of the sense of sight,'—as also would an artist who could see on a vacant chair or pedestal a model which in his imagination he had dressed and posed."

This parallel example of her own supplementing recalled the incident that suggested it, and she turned to Hammond's extract from Wigan's account of the painter, Blake, who possessed in a very high degree this power of voluntarily producing hallucinations, and who exerted it, in order to relieve his subjects of more than one sitting, until, to quote the artist himself, "By degrees I began to lose all distinction between the imaginary and the real figure, and I sometimes insisted to my sitters that they had sat the day before. Finally I was persuaded that it was so, and then all was confusion; I recollect nothing more. I lost my reason, and remained for thirty years in an asylum."

Her thoughts naturally drifted off into a realm of speculation at this point, and she built an airy superstructure toward which her heart as well as her imagination contributed material.

Shreves Chilson, an artist gifted with Blake's dangerous power, had seen her on some occasion, impressed her face upon his memory, gone back to his studio and painted her in every character his fancy dictated; dressed her, posed her, called her up before him day after day, until at last all consciousness of this false perceptive power was lost, and the ideal gradually became to him the real. What wonder that he should have learned to love this daily companion, have linked his life with hers, exchanged with her his wishes, hopes and ambitions, and surrendered his heart as irrevoc-

cably to this worshiped vision of his uncontrolled imagination as he could have done to the living, breathing original whom he did not know until the power to distinguish between them was gone! What wonder that he was angered at her for an ignorance that could but seem to him whimsically feigned!

All the fear and repulsion awakened by Lilian's letter was forgotten in this new and satisfactory theory, and insanity was fast regaining its mysterious, romantic, archetypal form in her imagination. She uttered a sigh of comparative relief when, having resumed her investigation, she read under the head of delusions the following:

"Illusions and hallucinations may exist, and the individual be perfectly sensible that they are not realities. In such cases the intelligence is not involved. But if he accepts his false perceptions as facts, his intellect participates and he has delusions. A delusion, therefore, may be based upon an illusion or a hallucination. It may also result from false reasoning in regard to real occurrences, or be evolved out of the intellect spontaneously as the result of imperfect information, or of an inability to weigh evidence, or to discriminate between the true and the false."

Miss Mordeck no longer had a doubt as to the question and nature of Shreves Chilson's insanity—a comfortable state of certainty that even medical experts seldom arrive at: but she did not know this, any more than does the world at large know

but each individual case of insanity has its patent cause; and with her two hours' study she had obtained a very satisfactory knowledge of the causes, diagnosis, prognosis, pathology and treatment of her lover's case.

She closed the book and pushed it back on the table, mechanically piling one volume upon another and looking about her for a means of getting them re-transferred to the desk. Her thoughts were not disengaged enough to allow a feeling of surprise as the reporter was again on hand to proffer his timely assistance. She thanked him, and left the library in a mood of wisdom and elation.

She had gone only a short distance when she met Tom. The look and general air of her young brother was so stern and important that her heart, or perhaps conscience, stirred with a vague uneasiness.

"I was going to the library for you. I should have been sorry to have missed you," said he epigrammatically.

"Is—is papa ill again?"

"Father is all right; it is you I want to see."

Miss Mordeck was used to these sudden fits of protection on the part of her youthful brother, and had heretofore rather enjoyed them in an amused, humoring spirit; but the past fortnight had written a few pages in her life not so open to inspection as the former leaves had been, and she chafed under Tom's silent and mysterious manner.

"I ran upon it by accident," said Tom, apropos

of nothing save his own thoughts, and to his sister's further bewilderment. "Royster is here and—you were expecting Dr. Royster this week, weren't you?"

"Yes, I think so—though I had forgotten it."

"Well, he is here anyway, and is going to call this evening, or at least that was his intention until we saw what we did this afternoon. He is terribly cut up over it, and I couldn't give him a bit of satisfaction, because, you know, the whole thing was as great a mystery to me as to him."

"Tom," Browné said, coming to an abrupt stop in the middle of the sidewalk, "would you enjoy looking at me behind the bars of a lunatic asylum?"

"Eh?" said Tom, pausing with equal abruptness.

"If so, just continue your lucid remarks upon 'Royster,' 'cut up,' 'mystery,' 'satisfaction,' 'ran upon it,' and all that. Tell me straight out what you mean!" exclaimed she with rising anger.

"I will show you in a few minutes," replied her brother sternly. And with this she had to be content until they had walked some distance and reached the entrance of a public building over the door of which was the temporary sign, "Art Exhibition of Home Talent."

A vague terror seized her as she read the sign; but Tom's eyes were upon her and she quietly climbed the steps, leaning none the heavier on Tom's arm for the weight upon her mind.

A long gallery of exquisite bits of art was traversed with strides by the unappreciative Tom, and Browné sank, out of breath, into a seat opposite the picture in front of which Tom had come to an ominous halt. Eagerly curious, yet almost fearing to lift her eyes, she nervously unfastened her long sealskin coat, which was oppressive in the overheated room, and especially so to her in this sudden faintness that was overpowering her.

"This is what I mean," said Tom, shaking his cane angrily at a life-size Ophelia, "and I want to know when you took to serving as model to painters—you with a face that is known to half of Chicago!" he exclaimed with egotistic exaggeration. "Oh, sister, how could you do such a foolish, imprudent thing!"

Tom's mild diatribe fell upon unheeding ears. Browné had been caught up in a rush of tenderness and wonder and borne beyond the consciousness of her brother's reproaches and her own heart's misgivings. She gazed enraptured, making no effort at artistic analysis, only seeing a clear, sequestered stream mirroring the drooping willows and a garlanded, girlish figure on the opposite bank. With slowly yielding fascination her eyes wandered from the bare feet up the clinging, flower-bespattered drapery, to where the small hands clutched the garland that wound like a treacherous rope about the slender throat revealed by the open waist. From here it was but one more step to the face she longed yet dreaded to

see. With a brief, silent prayer she lifted her eyes to the unconscious, pathetic ones that looked at her from the picture with a fathomless depth of unrealized sorrow.

"Surely, surely I am not so beautiful as that!" murmured Browné, as if protesting against the lover-artist's partiality.

"Yes you are," said Tom unflatteringly, "or you would be, decked out like that. Who is S. C., Browné, and who went with you to his studio?"

"I don't know," she murmured absent-mindedly.

"Don't know who went with you? Browné, you sure—"

"Nobody went with me, I was never there myself, I don't know—"

"Browné!" exclaimed Tom in an angry but subdued tone, taking hold of her shoulder in a revivifying manner not wholly gentle, "stop muttering and tell me what you mean. Who is this presumptuous artist and how came he to take such a liberty, unless—"

"Tom, you jar on me inexpressibly," murmured Browné with gentle impatience.

"Not as much by a good deal as will a sensational publicity of this thing if a reporter gets hold of it," said Tom with uncompromising practicalness.

Browné sighed, and withdrew her eyes from the picture and fixed them upon Tom.

"How could I prevent it? The man is crazy—"

"That same crazy fellow that made love to you on the train and imagined you were—"

"Yes, he is the same, and I have met him once since. He told me he had painted me as Ophelia and various other characters."

"Sh!" whispered Tom and drew her away from the picture.

"What is it?"

"A fellow over there was listening." Browné went home in a dream; and Tom, impressed by what she had told him, and a little awed at her mood, considerably kept quiet; and at dinner that evening he monopolized the conversation in order to conceal her abstraction. He was not wholly convinced about the man's being insane, but Browné was enough to turn a fellow's head, and it was highly probable that an artist chap pretty hard hit might be able to remember her face long enough to paint it; consequently Browné wasn't to blame, and—he would just hunt the fellow up the next morning and induce him to remove the picture, etc., etc. Tom was young and unfamiliar with Cupid's ways and disposition, and his slumbers that night were undisturbed. As for Browné, in the days that followed she often wished she had never wakened from that night's dream, but had passed on into Heaven, upon whose threshold she must have stood.

CHAPTER VII.

“**B**ROWNÉ, here is something that will interest you,” Mr. Mordeck said at the breakfast table the following morning, folding his paper into a convenient shape and reading aloud :

“In the Art Exhibition of Home Talent there is a picture to which is attached a romantic history. It is a character portrait, life size, and with no effort at disguising the model—and thereby hangs a tale. In this age of daring escapades on the part of fashionable young ladies the world is not surprised, only shocked, at hearing of Cræsus’ beautiful daughter being induced through vanity to serve as model for sculptor or painter; and were the case in question an instance of that sort, society might wink at it as a whim varying in degrees of questionableness according to the bank account of the *paterfamilias*; but a very much more romantic explanation of the presence of a well-known beauty’s head on the shoulders of Shakspeare’s most pathetic heroine can be given if the readers will be content to do without names.

“It seems that we have a modern Blake in our midst; but whether he retains as vividly in his memory the features of all his sitters as he has evidently done those of his beautiful model for

Ophelia, is a matter of conjecture. Anyway, we are reliably informed that the young lady whose face has been transferred to canvas in all its perfection, without the changing of a dimple or a lash, is a stranger to the artist, has never been inside of his studio, and has never, to her knowledge, met him more than twice, on both of which occasions his conduct was such as to induce her to charitably set him down as crazy. Poor fellow! Cupid must indeed have buried his arrow deep!

"Upon the strength of this charitable supposition and, perhaps,—who knows?—from a sympathetic heart-wound, the young lady is now deeply immersed in the study of insanity; and, judging from personal observation, the sane admirer will have little showing in the race against this artistic genius with the powerful imagination."

"A romantic tale, truly," observed Mr. Mordeck, laying down the paper and removing his spectacles, "but it seems to me a more natural and common-sense explanation could have been hit upon. The artist, who is certainly a presumptuous fellow, has doubtless seen the young lady at the theater and other public places and made a sketch of her. Some girls pose themselves in a box as if the remainder of the audience were a vast camera. However, the whole thing may be an advertising dodge. Bryan, give me a cup of warm chocolate."

Mrs. Mordeck suspected from the glances exchanged by Browné and Tom that they had an idea of the young lady's identity; but the half-

curious suspicion was forgotten in the absorbing pleasure of administering to her convalescing husband; and it can safely be asserted that no foreign thought obtruded upon her loving occupation as she sweetened the steaming chocolate to the taste long ago divined, and capped it with little billows of whipped cream.

The glances exchanged by brother and sister were full of meaning, and when breakfast was ended they left the room together, tacitly understanding that a meeting was both imminent and imperative. That Tom did not know all was a comfort to his sister as the door shut them in for their conclave.

"What is to be the upshot of all this?" Tom exclaimed angrily, his wrath stirred up against the artist and not his sister.

Placed in an attitude of dependence—Tom was the only sharer of her secret, and he only a partial one—Browné slipped her hand through her young brother's arm and said entreatingly: "Don't make a scene, Tom! I cannot tell you everything just now, but the explanation is quite, quite easy."

"I trust it is, for you will have frequent occasion to make use of it when curiosity has taken half the town to see the picture and you are asked a couple of thousand questions in regard to it."

"I can answer them," she said in a subdued tone, and with sparkling eyes which Tom attributed to excitement, but which was an exultation not wholly understood even by herself.

"Browné—sister—don't be foolish! you have never been so before."

She did not reply, and Tom could not interpret the look in her eyes. No, she had never been foolish before—she had never loved before, and her fate was such a strange, sacred one!

An early morning call—a very early morning call—cut short this *tête-à-tête* between brother and sister, and Miss Mordeck proceeded to the small parlor with the card of Dr. Royster, her "Hoosier" suitor, in her hand, while Tom thought to himself that it was no wonder she was surfeited with them, meaning proposals, when she had them for breakfast, dinner and between times.

The call was short. Dr. Royster had chosen an unpropitious moment, both as to the time of day and Miss Mordeck's mood. He blundered irretrievably at the outset by demanding an explanation of the article in the morning's paper and the circumstances leading to it.

She told him that when she desired to impart such information to him, or to avail herself of his obliging offer to settle with that reporter and that presumptuous artist, she would call upon him, but until then she would—change the subject.

Dr. Royster knew that politeness alone prevented her ending the sentence with more significant words, and he made haste to take leave without having uttered any of the warm, persuasive speeches that had flitted through his pleasant anticipation of this visit.

Browné did not realize how cruelly cold and indifferent was her dismissal of the man she had, not lured on perhaps, but certainly been interested in; for while she automatically performed this social duty, her senses were all locked in a sort of enchantment that puzzled her in after years,—indeed before the day closed, ere the train that bore her disappointed suitor to his home had reached its destination, she looked back upon the morning with a feeling of bewilderment, as one waking from a semi-conscious dream wherein all is so vivid as to seem real and so beautiful as to seem unreal.

Beautiful indeed was Browné's dream while it lasted! Shreves Chilson, sane or insane, had made his love for her apparent to all the world—their world—and gossip would compel some decisive action on her part. She could confess the truth and send Shreves Chilson to an insane asylum, or she could shield him with her love, and trust to time and her influence to conquer his delusion. She knew too much and too little of insanity to act with the discretion that one might have done who was entirely ignorant of the subject.

Insanity, she argued, was a mental disease, so called by physicians in lieu of a better term for it, and was of course subject to the varieties and degrees that physical unsoundness assumes. She would not marry an epileptic, such as poor Lillian's handsome, unfortunate lover had been, any more than she would marry a confirmed consumptive; but to look upon a simple, curable delusion

as a barrier to happiness would be as absurd as to reject a man because he possessed an aching tooth.

Shreves Chilson loved her, and it was her face, not her fortune, that he worshiped. When he exerted that weird reproductive power his imagination possessed, it was not banknotes that fluttered about his room, lay heaped upon the table, or assumed a tangible shape in the form of a dower; but it was her form that flitted hither and thither in his studio, that sat in this chair, that posed on that spot, that answered him back saucily, lovingly, meekly or imperatively, and which was known to him and loved by him, not as Miss Mordeck, the wealthy resident of a beautiful Michigan Avenue home, but as Naida, the homeless, habitationless model of countless pictures.

What wonder that she seemed cold, Doctor Royster! She was supremely happy at that moment, and it is not at such times that one is gentlest to the miserable.

When she had left the parlor she had gone to her room and there dreamed her short, blissful dream. Mr. and Mrs. Mordeck, having been informed by Tom of the purport of the doctor's visit, considerately left their daughter undisturbed until it should suit her to join them and confide to them the result of the early morning call. They of course could guess the fate the doctor had met with, but it yet remained for them to judge the effect the dismissal had had upon their daughter.

A half-hour later, perhaps, they saw her come downstairs, equipped for a walk, and slip out the door as if trying to escape observation. They naturally felt a little anxious, but respected her feelings too much to force themselves into her confidence.

Browné, with a feeling of joyous elation far different from the emotion accredited her by her sympathizing parents, proceeded buoyantly to pay her homage at the shrine where she had worshiped the day before; and when she again stood beneath the beautiful embodiment of herself and dwelt with blissful thoughts upon the love that could so idealize her, she told herself that but one thing was lacking to make her happiness complete, the presence of the artist to learn through his work how entirely he had won the heart he had sought so uniquely.

The great hall was almost deserted; not a sound broke the harmony of Browné's thoughts, and she lived a few moments of unalloyed bliss.

An exclamation startled her, and she turned her eyes from the picture to the figure at her side. It was a slim, graceful figure, enveloped in sealskin from head to foot, the counterparts of her own cap and coat. But this similarity fixed her attention only in so far as it intensified the general impression made upon her, and her eyes dwelt with especial fascination on the face beneath the cap. The face reflected her surprise and wonder; and her eyes, with slow, painful comprehension in

them, wandered from it to the face looking down upon the two lovely girls, either of whom might have been the model after which the beautiful Ophelia had been fashioned.

"What is your name?" demanded Browné in a low, expectant voice.

"Naida—"

The rest of the name was lost to her. She was rudely awakened from an unfinished dream. She did not care to analyze the cause or process of awakening; she was merely trying to realize that it was a dream. She turned and walked away, benumbed as yet to the bitter, humiliating, despairing emotions that would rack her soul later on. This unnatural calm lasted for hours. She went home, lunched, dined, and remained with the family until separating for the night; then in her own room she fought her fight alone. She came down to breakfast the next morning with no visible signs of the storm that had passed over her young life other than such as to evoke from Mr. Mordeck the observation to his wife that he feared Browné had refused Dr. Royster before she was quite certain of her own heart.

Shreves Chilson, in his third-floor apartments in North Clark Street, lived above the noise and clatter and distracting elements of city life until he chose to come down and mingle with them; and sometimes when an artistic mood seized him early in the morning, he would go to work and be lost

to the world, the necessity of breakfasting, the luxury of reading the papers, etc., until the day was far advanced.

His studio was the smallest and lightest of a suite of three rooms, and adjoined his bachelor reception room, which was furnished as might be expected of an artist with some talent, a little money, unlimited good taste and a love for the beautiful in every shape and form.

His bent seemed to be toward landscape, for with the exception of one face and form variously posed and dressed, there was nothing to indicate that figure or portrait painting was in his line; and visitors to the studio were inclined to classify his work under the heads of lucre and pleasure. This inclination would have been strengthened by a peep into the third room of the artist's suite, from the four walls of which one single face looked down upon the occupant and hovered over him, waking or sleeping, as his guardian angel. Shreves took no credit to himself for the life he led; he did not see how sin could invade the presence made sacred by that pure, beautiful face.

There was something in his betrothed's character not wholly satisfying to him as a man and lover, but her beauty filled his artist's soul with a rapture almost divine, and bound him to her with chains he had vainly tried to break. The effort to break them, however, was a thing of the past; the man had yielded to the artist in this as in everything else. A lucrative but uncongenial busi-

ness, family, home and friends had in turn been sacrificed at the shrine before which he bowed; and now, in a strange city, among strangers, one of many artists obtaining their daily bread by the brush, he lived his bohemian life, indifferent to all the world save his betrothed, a few friends, and his patrons.

While Browné Mordeck was awakening from her brief, happy dream, Shreves Chilson was touching here and there the sleek coat of the transformed Actæon, and gazing into the beautiful, hunted eyes with a tender pride never before so keenly felt toward any subject beneath his brush. The stag was at bay, and its graceful neck was turned until the despairing human eyes of Actæon looked upon the faithful hounds that in ignorance would soon rend their beloved master.

The artist gazed long and earnestly upon his work; and though he realized that it was his masterpiece, that if exhibited it would bring him fame as well as money, for one moment he held his brush suspended to blot the beautiful creation from the canvas.

"I can't do it," he said aloud, dropping the brush and clasping his hands behind his neck. "It was cruel, my darling, to bring that look into your eyes; but it was there for a moment—I could swear to it—and there it must remain so long as my Actæon has a place in this world."

He pushed back from his easel, arose and went into the adjoining room. It was then eleven.

o'clock, and so near his luncheon hour that he decided to omit the breakfast he had only a moment before remembered; and, artistically arrayed in jacket and paint, he sat down to read the papers before going to the restaurant he was patronizing for the time. He naturally turned to the column headed "Painters' Prattle," and there ran upon the romantic bit of gossip that Mr. Mordeck had read aloud at the breakfast-table two hours before. He read it through from beginning to end, trisecting it with a single ejaculation rung upon all its inflective and emphatic keys:

"The *devil!* the devil! the devil!"

"No, you are mistaken; it is an angel," protested a soft voice from the doorway.

"Come here, Naida, and let me read you something," said Shreves, forgetting in his indignant perplexity the formalities of a greeting.

She went and stood by his side, and rested one small gloved hand on his shoulder while he read the article that was puzzling to him but amusingly plain to her.

CHAPTER VIII.

“**N**AIDA, have you any idea what it means?” Naida could of course have hazarded a very probable guess; but, yielding to an impulse she seldom resisted, she answered in the negative.

If she told Shreves of her strange discovery in the Exhibition Hall, of having stood beneath his picture face to face with a young girl who might have served for its model as aptly as herself, he would ask so many questions, demand so many explanations, recall in all probability every meeting of theirs in the past six months in order to ascertain when it was herself and when her double that he had met, and so vary the pleasant routine of their daily life as to jar unbearably upon her easy, harmonious nature. There was no element of jealousy in her silence—simply a morbid aversion to innovations. If she could have had the ordering of her own life she would have chosen to drift in an even, placid channel without ebbs or flows—of joy or misery—preferring always medium pleasures to heights or depths; and, barring this power, she conformed her life to her ideal in so far as she could mould and shape circumstances, the moulding and shaping not always being such as a conscience, impressionable as her feelings,

would have approved. The paths chosen with this selfish end in view were sometimes not the straightest and freest from obstacles; but rather than turn back and try a new road, she would calmly face the difficulties and push forward, trampling under foot all things weaker than herself, and making a Pharisaical detour around disagreeable and unsurmountable obstacles.

The fact that the truth in the present instance would have lifted from her shoulders the burden of many falsehoods found necessary to a smooth, peaceful existence, and been a shield for future prevarications, did not seem to her to compensate for the worry and wonder her revelation would evoke. Shreves would be ready to go down upon his knees and implore her forgiveness for unjust accusations were she to tell him of the stranger he had more than once mistaken for her, and upon whose account he had reproached her with a bitterness that wounded her so deeply as to close her lips over proof that she might have given him of his error. Convinced of his mistake in one instance he would be ready to assume the entire blame and fit this explanation to all other doubtful occasions; but the imploring penitence consequent upon this reaction would be so different from his quiet recognition of her one fault, that she decided the attitude to which she had grown accustomed was preferable to a new and untried one.

In accordance with the foregoing theory, which

had been rapidly evolved out of preconceived ideas, thoughts, feelings, and wishes, she followed up her negation with a silence joined in by her companion, who broke it at last with the firm but reluctant question:

"Naida, are you sure you have not conjured up this romance to gull some reporter and produce a harmless sensation?"

"I seek a sensation? Oh, Shreves!" She laughed until the little ripple of merriment exhausted itself. There was no ulterior force to push it beyond its natural limit, and her laughter was, as a general thing, merely a delightful, tantalizing strain of a melody of which one fain would have heard more.

"I am not so sure," he said, trying to look grave. "You have developed one or two such unusual traits of late that I must be pardoned for believing you capable of weakening toward your beloved monotony."

"Monotony? I think I can say in all sincerity I do not know the meaning of the word. I have never yet experienced anything regular and continuous enough to effect that desired end."

"How about my love?" said he, rising and standing beside her, but refraining from the caress he might have taken in her own home.

"That is the most nearly perfect thing my life has ever known," said she simply.

"You could not live without it?"

"No more than I could live without breathing."

"Without breath you would be an angel," murmured Shreves, less of religion than adoration prompting his trite and axiomatic observation.

"A beautiful theory!" shrugged she. "Without breath I should be—nothing."

"You little nihilistic infidel!" laughed Shreves, not believing she understood the meaning of her own words.

"It is the only comfortable belief," said she calmly. "The belief in transmigration of the soul would produce a tantalizing uncertainty as to the kind of body one's soul might pass into. Being doomed to everlasting punishment in Hades or perpetual singing and rejoicing in Heaven is equally repugnant to me; therefore, I prefer to accept annihilation as my future state."

"You talk foolishly," said Shreves, "and such words are unbecoming to pure young lips." He was not himself what strictly might be termed a religious man; but like the majority of men he preferred that his wife should be a Christian, and he considered it absolutely monstrous that a woman should hold such notions as his beautiful *fiancée* had just given utterance to, and he did not attempt to conceal his shocked disapproval. She arched her brows and remained silent.

"Where is your mother?" he inquired, glancing toward the door as if expecting Mrs. Dunbar to enter.

"She could not come to-day—"

"You came alone?"

"Yes; why not? Mamma told me to wait until to-morrow, but I did not care to wait and I—"

It was useless to continue her explanation, as Shreves was not there to hear it, and she walked over to the window and gazed down upon the hurrying and bustling throng below.

He was absent only a few minutes, and reappeared transformed outwardly and inwardly. He had on his overcoat and cap and was drawing on his gloves.

"Come!" he said shortly. He preceded her down the hall, and they descended to the street in silence,—indeed, he did not speak to her until they had gone almost a block.

"What is the matter with you, Shreves?" she inquired with the utmost innocence.

He had walked off some of his vexation, and was able to reply more gently:

"It is a pleasure of course, Naida, for a man to think and act for the woman he loves, but at the same time he would like her to exercise a little discretion."

"Oh! is that it!" said she quietly, without the faintest accession of color at the pointed rebuke.

They walked a number of blocks in silence, she waiting for his ill-humor to expend itself, and he seeking excuses in her youth and guilelessness for imprudent actions he so often found it necessary to condemn. When they reached Col. Dunbar's home in Lasalle Avenue, with its unpretentious exterior and artistically perfect interior, he could

not fail to note with what skill she parried her mother's anxious inquiries about her absence, and unwillingly he was made a party to several implied, if not direct, falsehoods.

"I brought Shreves home to lunch with us, mamma. I am sure he couldn't get anything at a restaurant half so good as aunty's cooking."

"Mr. Chilson is always welcome," said Mrs. Dunbar with a warm smile.

"When papa is not around," supplemented Naida bluntly.

Shreves could not think of anything to say just at the moment, and an embarrassing silence followed, broken at last by his saying lightly:

"What would you think, Mrs. Dunbar, if I were to tell you I forgot to breakfast this morning?"

"Think?" laughed she, with quick appreciation of his tact, "I might think you were a little unbalanced."

"There certainly must be some defect in my mental equipoise, for you are the second to hint at it," and he read her the piece in the morning paper.

"I will hurry up luncheon," said Naida, leaving the room to escape her mother's first outburst of surprise, indignation, and perhaps questioning curiosity.

"Have you any clue to its origin?" Mrs. Dunbar inquired when he had finished reading, with little if any of the three emotions anticipated by

her daughter, and to a certain extent by Shreves also.

"None whatever."

"I may be doing the child an injustice, but I am inclined to think Naida herself is responsible for this—wait, let me explain. You will admit that I have had a better opportunity to study her in twenty years than you have had in six months, and I assure you this freak is just like her. If a stranger has questioned her as to her connection with your picture—and you know she goes to see it every day—her most natural impulse, evidently yielded to, was to weave this fantastic romance and tell it to him without considering the consequences. When she was a tiny, elfish child she would narrate to me the most weird and impossible tales, and solemnly assert the truth of them 'because she had seen them with her own eyes!' No sort of punishment availed to prevent these freaks of imagination, and her father and I decided to trust to time and experience to overcome them. Her belief in them has of course been overcome, but she occasionally indulges in imaginative exploits for other people's bewilderment and her own amusement. Have you questioned her about this?"

"Yes. She denies all knowledge of it."

Mrs. Dunbar was silent. Shreves felt indignant at her silence, yet he realized that Naida's denial had not convinced him either. His heart was full of anger and discontent and yearning

tenderness and indignant protest, and he fixed his gloomy eyes upon Naida's mother, who, in her turn, fastened hers upon a particular rug on the floor.

Such an attitude could not of course be of long duration; but Shreves had ample time for the futile tracing of a semblance he fain would have found in the mother's face, but for which he was always compelled to turn to the father's. Mrs. Dunbar was taller and slenderer and darker than her daughter, with more strength and less beauty in her face, and her eyes and lips betokened a power to love deeply, hate bitterly, and proudly conceal either when necessary. Through her nature, which was gentle, womanly and intense, ran an alien vein of humor pleasant and unexpected as a tropical breath in midwinter; and to this variable temperament was due much of the harmony that reigned in the isolated home in which no one else considered the art of adaptation of moods.

Shreves did not have time to pass in mental review all these previously discovered characteristics; but his momentary study of her face, cut short by a bright upward glance, served to renew the impression first made upon him by his calm Naida's mercurial, fascinating mother.

"It doesn't make much difference, anyway, does it?" said she, referring to her theoretical explanation of the piece in the morning paper. "All the curiosity in Chicago can not discover more than the fact that you regard your betrothed as a model."

He laughed with her, but her words jarred upon him, and he found it necessary to repeat over and over in his heart that it was Naida and not his model he worshiped.

Naida came in to announce luncheon, and the subject was not referred to again. She wondered at this, but when a result pleased her she never worried herself with tracing the causes that produced it.

The Dunbars' dining-room was not such as the Mordecks'; but a daintier luncheon could not have been spread had a French *chef* stood in Aunt Hester's shoes, as he could have done literally and figuratively, for it was Aunt Hester's proud boast that it was her broad feet that had enabled her to trudge the long distance between her and her beloved Miss Marguerite when the war closed and left her with a freedom she did not care to make use of,—while a little maid-of-all-work served the dishes more deftly, if with less dignity, than the obsequious and imposing Bryan.

When they had lunched and returned to the parlor, Naida found a box of her father's cigars and laughingly offered Shreves one. She knew he did not smoke and why he did not, but the fact that the "why" indirectly embraced a tribute to herself often led her to indulge in the farce of offering her *fiancé* a cigar and having him refuse it.

"I have not yet overcome my prejudice," he said, pushing the hand with the cigar in it out of

sight and availing himself of the opportunity to keep her at his side for a moment, while he gazed down into the face that was a continual feast for his artistic soul.

"I can't understand such a queer notion," said Naida, shaking her beautiful dark head. "Why should you despise the poor innocent cigar simply because your father made his money on tobacco and wants you to do the same? It doesn't make any difference how money comes, so it comes; and I am sure I care none the less for my sealskin coat because I suspect the money was obtained in a way not wholly congenial to myself."

"Naida, leave the room!" cried Mrs. Dunbar, struggling for a moment with her tears, then yielding to them.

Shreves found himself in the unique position of a man soothing his prospective mother-in-law in an outburst against his betrothed.

"Oh, Shreves Chilson! why did you ever shadow your life with ours!"

"I did not do it blindly."

"No, thank Heaven! You knew Jack before you did us; and knowing him, you knew me to be a gambler's wife and Naida a gambler's daughter. But," sharply catching her breath, "while I have never gotten over the shame of it, my beautiful child seems insensible to the disgrace. How can this be, Shreves?"

"Do you ask such a question?" said Shreves with a fond smile for the banished Naida, "you

who know her disposition so well. It is her nature to look on the bright side of things and to shut her eyes to things that have no bright sides. She cannot alter her father's mode of living, any more than she can change the nature of her charming mother, who goes from heights to depths and from depths back again with a rapidity to bewilder a less equable disposition than Naida's. Do not worry about Naida; rather envy her ability to accept things as they are and her inclination to pick out the roses of life without fretting at the thorns intermingled with them."

This view of Naida's character was acceptable to Mrs. Dunbar, and to Shreves also at the time; but when he was walking back to his studio, having informed Naida and her mother that he was coming again that evening, things took on a gloomy look that depressed him as nothing had done before during the six months he had known and loved Naida Dunbar. There came up persistently before him the scene that he had heretofore been able to a certain extent to keep in the background. There was a table and cards and two excited men; then discovered treachery, an outburst, and a deadly aimed weapon in the uplifted hand of Col. Jack Dunbar.

He had gone with a newspaper man to a gilded hell; and while his companion had made rapid notes of this most fascinating of sins and its alluring surroundings, he had stood close beside one table, bound as by a spell, and watched the vast



sums staked with a recklessness that had appalled even him, a son of wealth. Again he lived over the scene: his excitement grew with that of the players, his pulse beat quick, his breathing was short and irregular, his color came and went, and as his eyes followed the colonel's and the culprit's to the exposed ace, thence to something that gleamed suddenly across the table, his hand was quicker than Col. Dunbar's, and the pistol was discharged against the frescoed ceiling.

It was all over in a moment; Col. Dunbar had gazed in a dazed sort of way at the stranger who had averted the tragedy and saved him from becoming a homicide, then had slipped his arm through Shreves' and left the place. Chilson's companion had taken it for granted that the hot-headed gambler was a friend or an acquaintance, and had not followed them.

Col. Dunbar had said, when they were outside the door: "I know no words wherewith to thank you for what you have saved me from this night; but when you see those who are waiting for me at home you will understand something of what I feel but cannot express."

Even now, in broad daylight, as Shreves walked back to his studio, he recalled with a thrill that midnight visit to the gambler's home. Naida had seemed to him a beautiful vision from some other world. He had not closed his eyes the remainder of the night, and before many days had gone by he realized that Fate had raised another barrier

between him and his boyhood's home. The practical, obstinate father might in time have forgiven his son's devotion to art, but to a gambler's daughter—never.

Col. Dunbar's gratitude and admiration for Shreves had lessened as invitation after invitation to revisit the scene of their first meeting had been declined; and the unconscious, or rather the undesigned, example set him by the younger man had awakened in him a fierce resentment which in a nature like his made it discretion on Shreves' part to avoid unnecessary meetings. There was no tinge of physical cowardice in Shreves' discretion; it was not the man, but Naida's father that he wished to conciliate. Such was the disagreeable tenor of his thoughts as he returned to his rooms, and he had not the recollection of a pleasant interview with his betrothed to banish the gloominess consequent upon the many discordant elements of the morning. Indeed, his luncheon call had been the most unhappy he had ever made in that pleasant home, and Naida's mother must also have recognized the fact, for when Naida was dressing for the evening her mother told her to don her prettiest manner together with her prettiest dress, for Shreves must go away that night with a brighter look in his eyes than was there that morning.

Since her engagement to her artist lover, who posed her quite as often in her own parlor for his special pleasure and admiration as in his studio



for a more practical purpose, Naida's wardrobe had assumed something of the nature of a star's or a prima donna's, and it was no uncommon thing for her to receive her lover in the evening in a costume more classic than modish.

Such was the dress she chose for this particular evening; and as Shreves came from the cold outer world, into the warmth and perfume of his ideal world and saw between him and a background of red, noiseless flames a virgin priestess of some mystic temple, a worshipful light leaped into his eyes and burned out all remembrance of disloyal thoughts and once more filled his soul with harmony.

She stretched out her arms, bared by the loose falling drapery that served as sleeves, and said in a voice musical and beguiling as Circe's own:

"Shreves, I displeased you this morning; forgive me."

Was it the man or the artist that knelt at her feet and renounced wealth and the world of his past that he might possess this one being in whom his hypercritical eye had found no defect?

CHAPTER IX.

TOM'S baleful prophecy had not been fulfilled. The half-hundred or more persons who had traced the resemblance between "S. C.'s" Ophelia and the millionaire's daughter either took Mr. Mordeck's practical view of it or the reporter's sentimental one. Nothing seemed more probable to them than that an artist should avail himself as readily of an exquisite bit of human, as of an exquisite bit of scenic nature, and they could see nothing but an enviable tribute to Miss Mordeck in the artist's chaste, reverential use of her face.

The picture evoked considerable wonder and admiration and some curiosity of course, but before Browné could be persecuted with questions, congratulations, envy, flattery, or whatever turn the inquisitor's view might have taken, there was a social upheaval in consequence of an audacious bridal tour to Canada of a well-known couple, with fifty thousand dollars of the groom's employer's money. Miss Mordeck's innocent romance paled into insignificance beside so fruitful a theme for gossip; and the time she might have expended in strategic endeavors to ward off discovery of the real facts in the case was left on her hands to be devoted to self-reproaches, upbraiding and humili-

ation. In the strength of these emotions she for a time lost sight of the heartache underlying all; and it was her conscience, not her heart, that prompted the interview which was soon to take place.

She had divested the affair of all mystery by narrating to her father, mother and brother the simple facts as revealed to herself in the uncompromising glare of disenchantment; and the version given them, disembellished of romance, sentiment and fancy, was to the effect that upon two occasions she had been mistaken by Mr. Shreves Chilson, an artist and gentleman, for his betrothed, between whom and herself existed not only a resemblance, but an absolute identity of personage; and not dreaming of such an easy solution to a seeming mystery, she had believed the man insane and so expressed herself to Tom in the unobserved presence of a reporter. Hence, the romantic version in the newspaper.

She had chanced to meet the young lady, the original of Mr. Chilson's Ophelia, soon afterward in the Exhibition gallery; and the extraordinary resemblance, even to the minutest detail of outward dress, was such as to impress her just at first with the feeling that she was gazing at a mirrored image of herself; but gradually she realized the truth and demanded the stranger's name. She caught a portion of it, but in her amazement lost the most important part; and now an overpowering curiosity to meet and know this fac-simile, this

counterpart, this duplicate of herself had taken possession of her; and the only means of gratifying it was to have Tom call on Mr. Chilson, explain to him the source of the article in the paper, and request a formal introduction for a reason which, she would have Tom assure him, he would appreciate.

She explained to her parents that in justice to Mr. Chilson she could not tell them the real object of this desired meeting: for in her innocent pseudo-character she had obtained information which made it her duty to inform Mr. Chilson of the two occasions upon which he had mistaken her for his *fiancée*.

Mr. and Mrs. Mordeck realized the possibility of such a condition of affairs without precisely understanding the nature of it, and they gave a ready consent to their daughter's receiving the unknown artist in her own home.

Notwithstanding, or perhaps because of the anticipation of this peculiar visit, Mr. Chilson's card produced a little flutter of excitement when it was sent up a few minutes before the hour appointed for his call. Mrs. Mordeck exclaimed nervously:

"Shall I meet him first?"

"No, mamma; Tom will introduce me. Where is Tom?"

"Oh dear! Tom went out just this moment; he said he wouldn't be gone five minutes. What a vexation boys are! He might have waited until Mr Chilson came."

"Never mind, mamma; I shan't keep Mr. Chilson waiting a useless five minutes for a foolish formality. *Au revoir!* Don't be alarmed about me; I have met Mr. Chilson before, and assure you that he will not devour me."

She entered the parlor with slight trace of the excitement underlying her composed exterior; and Shreves Chilson, hat in hand, advanced and bowed with silent deference and awaited her recognition.

"Mr. Chilson, I had relied upon our only mutual acquaintance, my brother Tom, for this introduction; but my witness having disappeared at the critical moment, you will have to accept my word for it that I positively am not 'Naida', but Browné Mordeck."

She was smiling, and Shreves withdrew his fascinated, amazed gaze long enough to bow his head humbly and say in a semi-beseeching tone:

"Miss Mordeck, temper justice with mercy in dealing with me, for I have no word to utter in my own defense."

"You are reversing the order of things, Mr. Chilson; it is I who have to confess and receive absolution."

Shreves shook his head protestingly. "No; my conduct must have been unpardonably rude to cause you to mistake me for a madman. Miss Mordeck, I beg of you, from a fathomless depth of stifling curiosity, I implore you to tell me when—"

A painful crimson dyed her face and she bit her lips. He observed her confusion and said apologetically:

"Pardon me! The peculiar circumstances of our introduction have made me presumptuous."

"I did not so consider it," replied she simply. "The mortification I naturally feel at my absurd mistake is a part of the penance I owe to one whom I have unintentionally caused you to wrong deeply. I mean, Mr. Chilson, that upon the two occasions you mistook me for Naida—Dunbar? Thank you, I never knew her name before—for Naida Dunbar, you frankly deplored the one blemish you found in an otherwise perfect nature; and in the light of my discovery my conscience would not allow me to leave upon her the burden of accusations of whose source she was not only innocent but ignorant."

"Miss Mordeck, pardon me, but do you object to telling me whether or not we ever before the present interview had a conversation of any length?"

"An hour's *tête-à-tête* upon one occasion, and something less than a half-hour upon another," replied she as carelessly as she could.

"Once in a parlor-car?" he asked excitedly.

"Yes."

"Another time in Lincoln Park?"

"Yes."

"And it was you I saw walking with that notorious Dick Roland?"

"Very likely."

"Oh, my beautiful, outraged Naida! will you ever forgive me?" murmured Shreves, oblivious to everything save the memory of the bitterest quarrels of his and Naida's betrothal. Not a word of regret for the fright he had given her, Browné Mordeck; not a word of apology for the caress he had forced upon her; not one sympathetic thought for her in the mortification, curiosity and gossip she had been subjected to through him—all, all swallowed up in the selfish joy of finding his idol unsullied.

Miss Mordeck had been angry with herself, had condemned, reproached and upbraided herself, but never before had she had occasion to pity herself. The unconscious cruelty of the man she had given her whole heart to benumbed for a moment the sting of pride and left her sensible of nothing save a terrible pain and despair.

Shreves was recalled from his blissful reverie by the peculiar look on his companion's face, and he hurriedly reviewed his words to ascertain if possible what had brought it there. A frown of something more than apologetic regret darkened his face as he asked hesitatingly:

"Is Dick Roland anything to you?"

"The merest acquaintance," she replied indifferently.

"He is not fit to be even that; and your brother, fortunately for himself but unfortunately for you, does not know him as I do, or he would not allow him to speak to you."

"Mr. Dick Roland's fate is sealed"; said Miss Mordeck with a short, mirthless laugh.

"Have I offended you?"

"Offended me? Certainly not. On the contrary, I am grateful to you."

"I should be very glad, Miss Mordeck, to win the gratitude of one to whom I owe as much as I do to you," said he earnestly.

An obstinate, protracted silence followed; and although Shreves' visit had not yet reached the limit of a first call and he felt there was a great deal more to be said on both sides, he found himself quite involuntarily bowing himself out of the parlor and out of the palatial residence of the millionaire, and speeding away on the wings of love to cast himself in penance at the feet of her whom he had wronged so deeply. His thoughts went on the wings of love, but he had to be content with a more mundane route; and when he stepped off the car and walked across to the Dunbars' home he had prepared a speech that in length and eloquence was fit for a senate harangue.

He gained noiseless admission into the house through the agency of the housemaid, who was flirting with the postman, and finding Naida alone in the parlor his transcendental mood led him to an act of chivalrous humility seldom indulged in by young men of the nineteenth century, and which even in him betrayed a worship for an idol he had placed upon a pedestal rather than enthroned in his heart.

He crossed the room and knelt at Naida's feet, pinioning her hands in idleness across the pretty pretense of work to prevent her from rising and to concentrate her thoughts upon himself.

"Naida, I have been stupid, blind, suspicious, and I do not deserve your forgiveness, but I must have it; life would not be worth living without it, and you are too merciful to doom me to premature annihilation."

She looked down at him with smiling encouragement and not the faintest reproach in her eyes. He proceeded, but not in the grandiloquent strain predetermined upon.

"Naida, can you guess the simple explanation of all my false accusations against you? I have accused you of falsehood when the words should have been branded as a lie on my lips; I have believed in and accepted a defect in your character with an arrogant generosity that was an insult to you in your innocence. Is there in your heart a pardon for such sacrilege?"

"The fullest of pardon, my dear Shreves, for I am not sure I could tell myself from the young lady you seem to have wooed with such insane impetuosity."

"What!" almost shouted Shreves, springing to his feet. "You have seen Miss Mordeck—you have known all along of my mistake?"

"No; only in the past few days. I met her in the gallery Tuesday, standing enraptured before your Ophelia. She gazed at me for a moment,

demanded my name, then abruptly left the building. She struck me as an uncomfortably intense sort of person."

"Why did you not mention to me such an extraordinary discovery?"

"And have you accuse me of romancing?" retorted she with a shrug.

Shreves sank down in an attitude of resignation into the seat beside her.

"Naida, where shall I begin my atonement?"

"Don't undertake it," said she comfortably; and she arose and stood before him, directing his glance to the graceful folds of the train of the handsome gown just home from the modiste's, and which had been donned in a faint hope of the present unexpected visit. "How do you like it?"

"It is perfect—perfect as its wearer."

"What is its one fault?" she inquired with smiling malice.

"It does not exist!" he asserted with an earnestness more significant than the simple question itself could have evoked. Then he added beseechingly: "Naida, am I not to be forgiven?"

She stooped and pressed her lips to his, and once more all was harmony.

"Shreves, sit here and tell me all about your interview with Miss Mordeck. What is her other name?"

"Browné—B-r-o-w-n-é, with the *e* accented."

"Whence the peculiar orthography?"

"The effect of style upon the commonplace; her mother's maiden name was Browne."

"Is she—"

"Pretty? Yes; lovely as a dream."

"That goes without saying," said Naida with a faint, very faint, deprecatory *moue* and a glance into the mirror, then into her lover's eyes. "I was going to inquire, however, if she is rich."

"Tremendously so."

"Oh, yes! I remember; the paper stated she was a millionaire's daughter and a belle. How annoyed she must have been at the curiosity and gossip caused by that article!"

Shreves remained silent; his conscience began to prick him gently, and he decided that unless driven to the wall he would not admit his selfish disregard of the unpleasant duty Miss Mordeck had performed toward himself and his betrothed.

"You expressed regret, of course, for the alarm your insane conduct caused her, and apologized for any familiarity our unfortunate resemblance may have betrayed you into?"

"No, Naida, I did not!" confessed he with chagrin. "I couldn't think of anything but flying to you to beseech your forgiveness for the injustice of the past month, and I added another enormity to my list of offenses by quitting Miss Mordeck's presence abruptly, when from the nature of the interview I should have awaited her dismissal. I must go to my room and plan some way out of my awkward position; it is an outrage against

common politeness and civilization. Good-by, sweetheart, you are a precious little possession, and far too perfect for such a faulty owner."

He spent an hour or more that night trying to write Miss Mordeck a combination note of gratitude, regret and apology, and at the same time trying to condense it into a simple request to call, with a few extenuating reasons therefor. It is needless to say such a literary production was beyond him; and he retired in disgust, to dream of an intangible something with neither face nor form but possessing divers characteristics peculiar, fascinating, repelling, bewildering, which produced chaos in his mind and heart and made awaking welcome.

CHAPTER X.

BROWNÉ had spent the hours, consumed by Shreves in his futile effort to indite that remarkable note, in the first fit of unrestrained tears she had indulged in since her rude and unhappy awakening. A deep sense of self-pity had taken possession of her, and she pathetically compared her case to that of a child, surfeited on sweetmeats, crying for a crust of bread.

She had been unmoved under admiration, flattery, even deep and genuine love, until she had begun to believe herself incapable of the grand passion; and the discovery so recently made revealed possibilities that could make life a dithyramb or a dirge, but never would admit of its stagnating into a platitude.

The beginning of the day following Mr. Chilson's call seemed attuned to the key of a dirge; but, too proud and generous to inflict a gloomy face on the breakfasters, she frowned at the listless figure reflected in the mirror, stretching its unrested limbs on the wide white couch, and after a yawn or two arose with deliberate purpose.

A quarter of an hour later she emerged from her bath a veritable naiad, an Undine in an embroidered bath-robe, an Aurora flushed with the kiss

of the Sun-god fresh from his dip in the ocean. She came downstairs with no trace of the crossness that was distinctly visible the night before; and Mrs. Mordeck was glad she had confided her suspicions to no one, not even to her husband, who usually shared her thoughts almost before they became known to herself.

Browné put her arms about her father's neck and added to her good-morning: "Dr. Garrard has struck you off his list, has he, and you are going to forsake us this morning."

"Only for a few hours a day for the next week or so; I am not quite out of Garrard's clutches yet, though I seem to be sounder than before my illness."

"I don't know about that; you and mamma both show the effects of it."

Mr. Mordeck glanced hurriedly at his wife and got up and followed her (follow is the only verb that expressed motion toward Mrs. Mordeck). His attention being called to it, he noticed a look in his wife's eyes he had never seen there before, and he said wistfully as he took her face between his hands:

"Ethel, was there anything in my illness, beyond anxiety, to leave this shadow on your face?"

"Was that not enough?" said she with a smile which he could not decide to be frank or evasive.

He turned away from her, his melancholy eyes full of gloomy foreboding, and murmured: "Better to have died than clouded my Ethel's life."

"Ah no! anything but that!" she exclaimed, silencing his lips with her own.

"Is the paper more interesting than your letter?" Tom inquired of his sister, entering the breakfast-room and casting about for a means of getting possession of the Herald.

"My letter? I had not discovered it. Is it so late as that?"

"It came by special delivery," explained her mother.

"The writing is unfamiliar," mused she, without any suspicion of its source. A blush, a frown and a constrained laugh marked her perusal of the short note.

"What is it?" her parents asked with different degrees of curiosity.

"Mr. Shreves Chilson has come down from the ecstatic heights to which my information transported him yesterday, and it seems he has been laid hold upon by a host of outraged proprieties which necessitate a second and penitential visit from him at 11 A.M. to-day. If I am at home to him he will be very grateful, etc., but if I am not, he cannot blame me, etc., etc., again. What time is it now? Nine? I cannot vouch for my mood two hours hence; we will wait and see where his card finds me."

"Where do you say, Ethel?" said Mr. Mordeck, flipping a gold piece on the table and covering it with his hands as Browné left the room.

"You may have choice," laughed she, secure in

her woman's intuition and in man's clumsiness in guessing upon such delicate subjects.

"Not at home, then."

"I will say at home," said Mrs. Mordeck with quiet confidence.

Promptly at eleven o'clock the bell rang.

Miss Mordeck was not so punctilious about wasting five minutes upon this occasion, and many additional seconds had ticked on to the three hundred before she even began her descent.

Her dress made no noise as she came down the broad stairs and entered the parlor; and a friendly, amused laugh was the first warning Shreves had of her presence. He came forward hurriedly and took the hand she offered.

"You have already pardoned me?" he said in a tone of immeasurable relief.

"Your offense was simply a characteristic fault of your sex," shrugged Miss Mordeck, and motioned him to a seat.

"Selfishness, you mean," replied he, declining the chair assigned him and seating himself nearer and immediately opposite her. "I plead guilty, and rely for my forgiveness upon a characteristic of your sex—sympathy."

She smiled, but said nothing.

"Miss Mordeck, we are in reality, I presume, acquaintances of scarcely twenty-four hours; but it would be foolish for us to retrace our steps and sedately cross the bridge spanning the intervening gulf between introduction and friendship, which

we have cleared at a single bound. You are the confidant of too many of the most sacred feelings of my heart to be a mere acquaintance. Your ready forgiveness argues sympathy, and sympathy is a secure basis for friendship. Am I presumptuous in assuming that we are to be friends?"

Her thoughts were rapid and varied during his earnest speech; pride and inclination concurring, she deliberately set herself adrift upon this treacherous sea with naught save the frail bark of his indifference between her and the buffeting waves. When shipwreck is inevitable, a philosophic mind is apt to wonder in what shape it will come; and Miss Mordeck, out of pure perversity of heart, smiled with unconscious sarcasm as she said warmly:

"But one feeling can exist between you and one whom Nature has made the twin sister of your betrothed."

"Thank you!" exclaimed Shreves impulsively. "I think I have felt, without being able to express, the feeling you define so pleasingly."

The length of the present call was proportionate to the brevity of the first, and more rapid strides toward friendship were never, perhaps, made in the same length of time. He made several efforts to express his deep regret for the annoyance he had caused her, both through her own fear and the gossip of others; but with seeming unconsciousness she drifted away from the subject as soon as begun, carrying with her her com-

panion, who felt that he was not saying what he had come to say, but was very well satisfied with the adjustment of affairs.

He was amused and puzzled at the effect produced upon him by this duplicate of his betrothed. Though their faces were as identical as two petals of the same rose, the artistic emotion and gratification awakened by a study of Naida's beautiful head was swallowed up in a tantalizing desire to know what was on the inside of Miss Mordeck's. He found himself trying to anticipate her thoughts, wondering what were her views on this subject or that (Naida's views were always what his were; the bump of combativeness was wholly undeveloped in her head), and more than once in the course of their conversation he had been pulled up and made to give his authority for such and such a statement, and some of his pet theories had been punctured with little darts of sarcasm which let out conceit, selfishness and other human foibles with a profuseness to bewilder the hitherto unsuspecting possessor of them.

As he took leave he was conscious of a doubt in his mind whether he had found Miss Mordeck an agreeable revelation in young ladyhood or not. He was distinctly conscious, however, of a feeling of relief that the resemblance between her and his *fiancée* was merely a physical one; for a wife with her own views in regard to things might prove as exasperating as a model with her own ideas of posture and expression. Some pronounced views

in regard to social responsibilities, duties of joint members of society to one another, lines to be drawn, etc., impressed Shreves with the conviction that honor demanded his acquainting Miss Mordeck with some of the circumstances in connection with Naida Dunbar's history before he assumed the responsibility of the introduction she had asked of him; and, naturally, this added nothing to the questionable pleasure of his visit.

Resenting the apologetic attitude in which he was placed toward his betrothed, and feeling savagely jealous of the imperious beauty who possessed, in addition to the face and form of his betrothed, the wealth, position and unclouded name to entitle her to say condescendingly who should and who should not be added to her list of acquaintances, his voice and manner were not the most amiable when he turned and re-entered the room, after having taken leave once, and said abruptly:

"Miss Mordeck, you have been so good as to ask an introduction to my betrothed."

"Yes?" said she, her tone faintly inquiring as he hesitated.

"You know nothing about her family—her station—her—"

"She is your betrothed," returned Miss Mordeck with quiet emphasis.

The effect of so gently significant a speech was not what would naturally be expected; but Shreves had never in his life been mistaken for anything other than a gentleman, consequently

there was no feeling of grateful appreciation to deaden his sensitiveness to the position in which his unfortunate love affair had placed him.

"Miss Dunbar is a lady pure, gentle and refined as yourself," he said proudly, feeling that every throb of shame and hesitancy was an insult to the woman he was to make his wife, "but she lacks one advantage possessed by her beautiful counterpart."

Miss Mordeck neither blushed nor smiled at this open compliment; in Shreves Chilson's eyes her beauty was merely a regretted, if not resented, duplicate of the face of the girl he loved.

"She is poor?" she said, her voice taking a doubtful inflection as she recalled the sealskin that was a duplicate of her own.

"Poor? Yes—poor one day and rich the next," said he bitterly.

"Her father is a speculator," suggested she, puzzled at his tone.

"Her father is a gambler," said he shortly.

Miss Mordeck's eyes dilated in sudden, unconcealable horror, and involuntarily a tinge of haughtiness crept into her manner. She repeated mechanically: "A gambler!"

Shreves was thoroughly angered—the more so because he was familiar with the creed of social justice which visited the iniquities of the father upon the children, and could appreciate the result of Miss Mordeck's teachings and surroundings, while he could not help resenting her surprise and dismay.

"I should have told you this before," said he coldly; "It is not too late even now, but I shall have to take the liberty of suggesting that instead of bringing Miss Dunbar to see you I would prefer to leave it with you to call or not call, as you please, upon her. You will pardon me, I trust, if I add that under the circumstances I think it would be as well not to pursue the acquaintance further. Good-morning!"

The effect upon Browné of this speech and abrupt departure was novel, and would have been puzzling to an observer. She made no response to his curt good-morning, stood quite still and watched him bow himself out of the room, then turned and disappeared into the darkened depths of the back parlor, where she threw herself on a sofa and cried as if her heart would break.

The readiness with which he gave up their proposed friendship cut her more cruelly than had anything ever before in her flattered, indulged existence. The bitter disappointment was the more surprising and humiliating because of no conscious anticipation. Out of the sea of darkness that had closed over her in the hour of her rude awakening, Shreves Chilson's plea for friendship had been a helping hand extended to draw her to a foothold upon what might have proven *terra firma* or the thin treacherous surface of a floating island. She had not questioned the nature of the earth beneath his feet—it was earth, and all about her was engulfing waters. She had lived a few blissful mo-

ments of security that had been, in the reaction of feelings, almost rescue; then she had seen the saving hand withdrawn and the looked-to preserver turn his back and walk calmly, cruelly away.

Wrecked hearts go down with less of an outcry, however, than do drowning bodies, and Browné got up and faced life proudly and bravely; and though she often found occasion to pity herself, it would never have occurred to any one else to bestow a similar emotion upon her.

Mrs. Mordeck had waited as long after Mr. Chilson's departure as anxiety and curiosity would admit of, then she started in search of her daughter. She met Browné coming out of the parlor and, noting the evidence of recent tears, followed her to her room. Turning the key in the lock and crossing over to the table where she could face Browné and at the same time find some employment for her hands, she demanded with a mother's intuitive suspicion:

"What is the matter, Browné?"

"Put down that bottle and I will tell you."

The bottle being rescued from its insecure position in the hands of her excitable mother, she continued:

"My fac-simile is a gambler's daughter."

"A gambler's daughter!" gasped Mrs. Mordeck, flinging open her hands with a little, helpless, horrified gesture.

"Pleasant prospect, isn't it? being laid claim to

on all sorts of occasions by the associates of a gambler's daughter!"

"But—but she is the betrothed of Mr. Chilson, and he is unmistakably a gentleman."

"Where did you ever see him, mamma?"

"I saw him both times as he left the house," she admitted, coloring.

Browné laughed. "Did he wear a placard on his back?"

"No; on his face. It requires more than one generation to refine features like his."

"Well, you are right, mamma; he certainly is a gentleman; but Cupid sometimes makes very great fools of gentlemen."

This sententious speech closed the conversation for a few moments.

"Do you intend calling?" asked her mother.

"Mamma!"

"Why not?" she persisted courageously, to her daughter's profound amazement. "If Miss Dunbar is so identically like you in appearance, she must be a sweet, refined, and ladylike girl, and her mother is evidently a lady, whatever may be her father."

Browné was taken too much by surprise at her timid mother's outburst of Philosophy versus Society to do more than murmur disconnectedly:

"I am sure I don't know. I—I didn't think about the matter after I learned about her father. I didn't think you and papa would permit me to—"

"Have we ever disapproved of your friendship for Agnes Farney?"

"No-o, certainly not; Agnes' family are the very best people, only her father is unfortunately addicted to wine."

"As Naida Dunbar's is to cards; and which is worse to be, the daughter of a gambler or a drunkard?"

The unvarnished word, "drunkard," jarred more harshly upon Browné's sensitive ear than did the circumlocution, "addicted to wine," and she answered her mother's question with prompt, shrugging disgust.

"Agnes is to be pitied infinitely more than Naida Dunbar. Drunkards are obnoxious—if not positively cruel—to their families, while gamblers are notoriously generous and affectionate. Of the two evils I think I should prefer a gambler to a drunkard for my father.—Are you ill, mamma?"

"No; I think your room is a little close and warm."

Browné threw up the window, and went and stood by her mother's chair.

"Do you advise me, mamma, to make Naida Dunbar my friend?"

Mrs. Mordeck hesitated a moment, then said with a sweet, sad smile: "A little woman of exalted position once told me that the Golden Rule is a key to the most puzzling of social problems. My advice is to try the key."

"It is very difficult to imagine myself the

daughter of either a gambler or a drunkard, but I will follow your advice so far as I can.—Mamma: you are ill! let me get you something,” cried Browné, alarmed at the recurring pallor of her mother’s face.

“A glass of water will do.”

When her daughter had left the room, Ethel Mordeck buried her face in her hands and murmured heartbrokenly:

“Oh, my husband, the most wretched of certainties would be less cruel than this doubt!”

CHAPTER XI.

A DEMON of unrest and dissatisfaction had seized upon Shreves. Browné Mordeck had come into his life a jarring element, a note of discord. His daily routine was disturbed without being broken up, and the pleasure, employment and thoughts of the past were insufficient for the present.

Naida's pure, beautiful face looking down upon him with varying expressions from the four walls of his room no longer typified to him the multi-form presence of a guardian angel, but was transformed into portraits of his sweetheart, hung in unpardonably conspicuous places. Of old when a visitor would sometimes pause beneath an occasional face that dotted the landscape-covered walls, and make the query, "An ideal face?" "My ideal face," he would answer, and the subject would be dropped. But now, since the hanging of his Ophelia in the Exhibition Hall, his studio was frequented by a new set who saw in every blonde or brunette queen or peasant a resemblance to the South Side beauty and heiress.

It angered Shreves to have his betrothed's perfect face stolen from her and added to the already numberless gifts bestowed upon Browné Mordeck

by Nature and man; and one day, in a burst of indignant resentment, he took down all bits of canvas that bore the stamp of Naida's features or inspiration and packed them away, reserving only a single picture to be hung at a shielded angle in his own room, where curious, desecrating eyes could not dwell upon it and, in thought, steal from his love her birthright.

As a secret atonement toward Naida and malice toward Miss Mordeck, he placed the bayed stag, Actæon, on an easel in the most glaring, conspicuous and unprotected part of his studio. Not satisfied with this, he threw the cover back from an unfinished study whose model was not wholly certain even to himself, and seizing his palette with nervous force and dipping his brush here and there on it with calm, cruel intent, he deliberately scarred and marred the exquisite face, matted and tangled the soft, loose ringlets, clothed the bare shoulders in coarse, dark rags, and inscribed beneath, "A Possibility."

No sooner had the direful words met his eyes than a swift revulsion of feeling took place. He saw that what he had done could apply to his betrothed as well as to Miss Mordeck, and he regarded the cruel defacement with tender, shuddering pity and keen remorse. He leaned forward and, resting his elbows on his knees and his chin in his hands, intently regarded his work.

Gradually the certainty was borne in upon him that the face in its unmarred state had been a por-

trait of Miss Mordeck and not of Naida. He had never been quite sure of this until the present moment, and the discovery was made in a way to gratify his artistic pride, but to fill his lover's heart with fear and resentment.

The longer he gazed at the disfigured face the less repulsive it became. Distinct characteristics of Miss Mordeck's face were brought out by this marred resemblance of mere features; and Shreves realized that there was something in Browné Mordeck's beauty not wholly dependent upon regularity of features and fairness of skin, and, moreover, a something tangible enough for him to have unconsciously seized upon it in the reproduction of her face from memory.

A smile hovered about his lips as he gazed at the face, attractive despite its defacement, and thought of the qualities, characteristics and originalities that went to make up the owner's individuality. He startled himself with the semi-audible apostrophe:

"I wonder if you would not be quite as attractive to me if I were blind?"

The spoken words, framed thoughts of which he had hardly been conscious, embarrassed him, and getting up hastily, he dropped the cover over the canvas, and walked away from it. He lay down on a couch, made folds of his handkerchief and put it over his eyes, holding the untied ends beneath his head, then crossed his arms across his breast; and thus outwardly prepared, tried to im-

agine himself blind and dependent upon Naida for amusement. How would she entertain him?

Posing would of course be out of the question, and a simple muslin would be to his sightless eyes the same as a gorgeous court dress or the artistic drapery of a statue. He sighed even though he but partially realized what the deprivation of this pleasure would be, and continued his odd, whimsical experiment.

She sang prettily and read poetry with a tender pathos, but conversation and prose reading were out of her line and would bore her inexpressibly did she force herself to them;—an improbable supposition, as she never compelled herself to anything in the nature of a task.

Regarding the matter in an experimental light, however, he was conscious of a certainty that he should in time weary of singing and poetry, and he cast about in his memory for other sources of entertainment, only to be forced to the very obvious conclusion that Naida's lover was never intended to be a blind man.

His thoughts having been diverted from his work and centered upon Naida, he yielded to inclination—the emotion that governed him mainly in his bohemian, semi-disinherited life—and proceeded to pay her one of his regularly irregular calls.

It had been a fortnight since that visit to Miss Mordeck which had ended in indignation and disaster, and notwithstanding his advice to the effect

that it might be better for all parties concerned if the acquaintance so briefly and romantically begun should be ended at once, he experienced now and then a fierce contempt for the slavish submission to a social code which arbitrarily fixed and proclaimed a line beyond which trammelled subjects dared not pass. He tried to persuade himself that he was disappointed in Miss Mordeck, that he had believed her independent enough to choose her own friends regardless of what the world might say; but he only succeeded in becoming thoroughly angry with her and in magnifying her originalities into eccentricities from which he was sincerely thankful his *fiancée* was free.

It was in this frame of mind that he arrived at Naida's home and was ushered into the parlor to be confronted by his sweetheart and her double. Aside from the surprise he naturally felt at seeing Miss Mordeck after his recent condemnation of her, there was no cause for embarrassment in meeting the two girls together for the first time, as there might have been had they been arrayed in their fac-simile street costumes of sealskin, for the bonnet, wrap and gloves of the one and the artistic gown of the other readily proclaimed which was visitor and which hostess. Consequently there was no hesitancy in his manner as he bowed to Miss Mordeck and greeted Naida with a handclasp and a direct, lingering glance out of his gray eyes which the others could imagine but not see. He was puzzled at her silence

and the flush that overspread her face, but was cut short in his surmises by gay laughter from the mothers of the two girls. He turned suddenly, with a slight frown and compression of the lips, and looked questioningly at Mrs. Dunbar.

She laid her hand on his arm, made an effort to resume her gravity, and motioned him to keep still until she could explain her own and her guest's untimely mirth.

"Have you not met Mrs. Mordeck?" she asked in surprise, noting his quiet attitude as he stood, hat in hand, facing no one directly except herself.

"I have not had that pleasure."

"Let me introduce you, and afterward perhaps you can be of service to two sorely bewildered mothers."

This gave him a hint of the situation, and he went through the introduction smilingly, expressed his pleasure at meeting Mrs. Mordeck, then turned again questioningly to Mrs. Dunbar.

"Behold an unnatural dilemma!" said she, answering his look and glancing with comical chagrin from one girl to the other: "Neither Mrs. Mordeck nor I can decide which is our daughter."

Shreves' eyes wandered naturally and significantly from the girls' faces to their dresses.

"No," said Mrs. Dunbar, shaking her head dubiously, "those doubles were out of our sight ten or fifteen minutes, and we strongly suspect they have changed dresses."

Shreves recalled the puzzling blush, and he bit

his lips as he thought of all his look and hand-clasp had conveyed.

"Mr. Chilson, you will win my lifetime gratitude and friendship if you will discover for us some infallible means of claiming our own," Mrs. Mordeck said, with a plaintive ring in her voice that betrayed more pain than amusement over the lost identity of her beautiful child.

"If I could hear their voices—" said Shreves hesitatingly. He stopped because, though he knew there was a difference, he had not detected it until he had known the girls under circumstances to preclude the possibility of a mistake.

Their mothers attributed the hesitancy to another cause, and exclaimed eagerly:

"Say something, girls!"

They both looked up with the sudden blankness naturally produced by a demand of that sort, then the bonneted and gloved one arose, curtsied, and began:

" 'There was a little man and he had a little gun,
And his bullets were made of lead, lead, lead' " ;

Shreves hushed the burst of laughter with an eager, uplifted hand, and motioned the other to take up the nursery jingle.

" 'He shot Johnny King through the top of the wig,
And knocked it right off of his head, head, head.' " "

There was a profound silence for full ten seconds, then Shreves said gravely:

"Both voices were Miss Mordeck's. Naida is a mimic."

Here was an unlooked-for dilemma. Nature had made them enough alike without this aid from art; and knowing Naida as he did, grave possibilities suggested themselves to Shreves.

"We have undertaken to discover some distinguishing characteristic," said he with a gravity not wholly feigned, "and we must not stop until we find it." He took out pencil and paper and began sketching their faces, in order to afford himself an opportunity for a prolonged and unembarassing study of their features. His unspoken thoughts ran after this order:

"Her eyes," (the eyes of the girl in home dress), "are larger and softer than the other's, possibly due to there being less animation in them; dilating, contracting, flashing, sparkling would undoubtedly produce a physical difference even had they originally been counterparts. Their noses are identically the same, but a slight difference in the length of their upper lips gives one face an easier, more classic expression in repose than the other.—Miss Mordeck is growing restless under my prolonged gaze; posing has become a second nature with Naida. My discovery is satisfactory to myself, and I do not think I shall have any trouble in the future in telling one from the other; but their anxious mammas are awaiting my decision, and I shall have to look for something more tangible than a lover's intuitions. Their hair is

the same color; their lips the same degree of redness; not a single abnormal mark on either face, and Phœbus and Boreas have not dared to interfere with Mother Nature's freak by laying a finger upon the one that they did not lay upon the other—My efforts, so far as any one save myself is concerned, are fruitless."

Crumpling up the paper, upon which he had drawn very few lines, he arose, crossed the room and dropped it into the grate. Standing with his elbow resting on the mantel, while the other four occupants of the oppressively silent room awaited the result of his investigation, he fell into a brief reverie, recalled himself, advanced and placed a small gloved hand in Mrs. Mordeck's and a bare one in Mrs. Dunbar's, said "There is your daughter, and there is yours," and then turned and walked away.

"Oh, Shreves! how did you find it out?"

"Oh, Mr. Chilson! how did you tell?"

These betraying exclamations confirmed his decision, and the girls' mothers cried disappointedly:

"Then you did not change dresses after all!"

After a certain amount of mirthful and exclamatory conversation, the question Shreves dreaded was put to him.

"Give us the key to your discovery, Mr Chilson," said Mrs. Mordeck.

"Yes," said Mrs. Dunbar, "we want to possess ourselves of an open sesame to these girls' identity."

"I fear you will be disappointed," he said, as if ready to abandon the explanation he had prepared, "but if you insist I shall have to beg the young ladies' pardon for my frankness. The only difference I have been able to discover is in expression. Naida's face is more perfectly classical than Miss Mordeck's, but Miss Mordeck's is more animated."

Mrs Dunbar raised her hands in comic despair.

"My dear Shreves! what earthly clew will that be to any save an artist's eye? If our mother-intuition, Mrs. Mordeck, does not discover something less vaporish than that, these children are likely to play us some knavish tricks."

"Miss Dunbar, we will put Mr. Chilson's key to the test by one more experiment," said Browné. "In another week Lent begins, and I am to close the season with a ball *finale*. If you will accept a personal invitation, in lieu of the printed one I shall send you as soon as I go home, we will order fac-simile costumes to be designed by the artist, Mr. Chilson, which will bewilder all beholders in more senses of the word than one."

Shreves' pleasure at this frank and unexpected invitation was somewhat marred by a sense of remorse at his previous misjudgment. An invitation to tea, to meet a very few of Miss Mordeck's friends, was the most he had expected; but to have his betrothed taken up so completely, invited to the most brilliant entertainment Miss Mordeck could give, introduced to all of her friends and acquaint-

ances, lifted at once to a plane of unapologetic intimacy, was an act of generosity and defiance of social shackles that filled him with gratitude and admiration.

He understood, without listening, the animated conversation that followed. He knew how the mother shrank from sending her daughter out to face the curious, prying world which she herself had so long ago renounced, and he also knew that mother well enough to appreciate what a temptation to her was this opportunity of affording her child some of the pleasures of youth and beauty and congenial companionship. He heard Miss Mordeck urge entreatingly as she took leave: "You will let us know soon, dear Mrs. Dunbar? There are only four more days, you know, in which to get up our dresses."

"I will let you know now!" exclaimed Mrs. Dunbar impulsively. "Naida shall come; and tomorrow she shall call to lay before you the most artistic design Mr. Chilson's genius is capable of evolving."

"Oh, thank you!" Browné cried delightedly, and abandoned the handclasp for a warmer good-by.

When the visitors were gone, Shreves asked laughingly:

"What aided you in your decision?"

"Do you know what that girl did?" said Mrs. Dunbar a little dramatically. "She sacrificed the elaborate, perhaps perfectly gorgeous, costume provided for this occasion—sacrificed it to an

awkward uncertainty. She was not sure that Naida could duplicate her dress, but she knew that she could duplicate anything Naida could afford. That is what I call tact exercised to the point of sublimity."

"Mamma is enthusiastic," observed Naida without the faintest display of appreciation.

"Such an act is worthy of enthusiasm," said Shreves warmly; but noting the look in his betrothed's eyes, which recalled the unexplained blush of a short time before, he turned the conversation and began to discuss with Mrs. Dunbar the pros and cons of the new life into which Naida was about to be launched.

When Mrs. Mordeck and Browné had settled back in the carriage and were being driven homeward, Mrs. Mordeck observed suddenly:

"How did you ever get up courage to sacrifice your beautiful dress?"

"Worth's costume cannot be duplicated on such short notice," replied Browné without a sigh. Perhaps there was compensation for her in the thought that she was to wear one designed by Shreves Chilson.

CHAPTER XII.

NAIDA DUNBAR called the following morning with Mr. Chilson's design for their dresses; these being approved, they went together to Madame Blank's to order them. It was luncheon time when they reached home, and Browné prevailed upon Naida to remain and meet her father and brother. Naida was delighted with Tom and he with her, but a mutual antagonism sprang up instantly between her and Miss Mordeck's grave, quiet father. She frankly and childishly admitted that she was disappointed in Mr. Mordeck, that he did not look nearly so much like her father as she had expected—he looked like him, but—

This was ground that craved wary walking on the part of the host and hostess, and they let their guest take the lead, only commenting on her statements without asking any questions.

As Browné returned from driving Naida home she could not refrain from dwelling upon the sudden and inexplicable antipathy evinced by her father toward the girl who was the counterpart of herself, the daughter whom he idolized. The occurrence only went to prove, however, that the intangible something which attracts or repels people, independent of volition, is more general and

comprehensive in its influence than she had supposed upon the one occasion when she had endeavored to analyze Shreves Chilson's indifference to herself and his worship of Naida Dunbar. The only thing approaching an explanation of her father's dislike was Naida's tactless reference to her own father. Browné smiled with bitter appreciation; it was even less enviable to resemble a gambler than to be the counterpart of a gambler's daughter.

When Mr. Chilson visited his *fiancée* that evening the chief topic of conversation was, naturally, her call of the morning. After learning Miss Mordeck's opinion of the design he had made as artistically beautiful as was in his power, he turned the conversation into the channel in which his curiosity ran strongest.

"You say you lunched with the Mordecks? Tell me about Mr. Mordeck."

"He is like papa, of course."

"Why 'of course'?"

Naida betrayed only the amount of surprise that could be expressed by opening her eyes very wide.

"Miss Mordeck and I are duplicates, and mamma is not at all like Mrs. Mordeck," she said simply.

Shreves laughed softly and bent over her for a moment. Whether or not he caressed her, neither her face nor attitude would have revealed. To the artist this repose was her chief charm, and in moods like the one that held sway over him this evening he was content to worship her as he would

a masterpiece on canvas or pedestal. He had forgotten their unfinished topic, and was gazing at her in a sort of rapture when he was recalled by the sound of her voice and the movement of her lips:

"Yes; he undoubtedly looks like papa, but not so much as I expected; he is older and he hasn't the dash and style and vim about him that papa has. He is too melancholy and gloomy and sanctimonious looking to suit me. Papa's intensity wearies me sometimes, but that man's gravity and goodness are oppressive."

Shreves' curiosity was whetted to an unusual degree by this negative description, and he looked forward to his meeting with this moral antipode of Capt. Jack Dunbar with an eager anticipation for which he could not account.

A gentle rap aroused him and Naida from the quiet reverie into which they had fallen, and Mrs. Dunbar called to them whimsically from the doorway:

"May I come in? I am blue and nervous and lonely. I shall lose my mind if I stay shut up to myself any longer."

"We shall be more than pleased to have you," said Shreves, smiling a sincere welcome and drawing a chair near to him and Naida. "What is the particular shade of your mood to-night?" continued he lightly.

"A deep, dark, but not beautiful blue, without even a streak of gray to lighten it. I feel as if my

body were one long nerve strung to its highest tension and exposed for the imps of darkness to beat against.—What is that?"

"Merely some one walking along the street. You should try to control—"

"Mamma, are you expecting papa?" interrupted Naida calmly.

"I never expect your father, Naida," replied Mrs. Dunbar irritably. "He comes and goes as he pleases and when he pleases, and at the present moment he may be in Mexico or Canada for all I know."

"Or right here in Chicago," said Shreves, to dispel the unintentional suggestiveness of Mrs. Dunbar's antipodal selections.

"No, not in Chicago, unless he has just arrived; he always comes home first, then—then if he hasn't any money, or only a very little, he goes—goes—to the place where you found him that night."

"Mrs. Dunbar," began Shreves with some hesitancy, "may I ask you a very frank, perhaps impertinent, question?"

"You have a right, Shreves, to know anything I can tell you."

"Well then, does Captain Dunbar generally come back from these long trips—er—with money or without?"

Mrs. Dunbar colored, then raised her eyes and said frankly: "Sometimes with and sometimes without. It is no unusual thing for him to give

me a thousand dollars at a time, or bring Naida and myself some costly present such as her seal-skin and my diamonds; yet there are times when he comes home without a penny. At such times he asks me for ten dollars—never more nor less—and goes out and returns almost invariably with an abundance of money. One time he gave me five thousand dollars upon his return from a shorter absence than usual, then left almost immediately, and I did not see him again for a year. I keep a bank account, of course, and make my expenditures more regular than my income, else I should very likely find poverty staring me in the face some day without any idea of which way to turn."

Shreves would have liked to say "to me"; but that was one of the humiliating phases of his engagement. He was virtually a disinherited son, and his brush barely supported him in decent style.

"Have you never resented this mystery and desertion?" exclaimed he hotly.

"Yes, once," said she in a hushed voice. "I thought he would murder me."

"Has he added cruelty to all his other sins against you? Dear Mrs. Dunbar, why do you not free yourself from such a man?"

"Free myself?" murmured she in a slow, intense voice. "Do you ask me that question? you who are a lover, almost a husband? You have never loved. Loved!" exclaimed she, rising and walking the floor excitedly. "What do you and Naida

know about love? Her one thought is to make herself beautiful in your eyes, and you pose and paint and admire her without a quickening pulse or a single extra heart-throb. Dear Heaven! if my love were such as that what misery I should have been spared!"

Naida shrugged her shoulders and lay back on the sofa, thinking how uncomfortable it must be to feel so intensely; while a sudden, intense longing to experience a love like Marguerite Dunbar's sprang into life in Shreves Chilson's breast.

"I did not know you loved him so," said he with apologetic sympathy.

"Love him? love him?" she cried, pausing and bending upon him feverishly brilliant eyes darkly circled, "I worship him! You do not know him, Shreves, not the Jack Dunbar I know. His coming is sunshine, his departure a gloom that makes my heart ache with its weight. Fiery, impetuous, handsome Jack Dunbar! How he wooed me! Little do you calm, cold lovers know of such a wooing. One, two, sometimes three weeks at a time he makes our home a paradise with his merry laughter, his gay songs, his boyish whistle, then—misery, misery, misery! Sweet Heaven, what misery!—But," cried she, throwing out her arms as if appealing to the absent husband, wherever he might be, "I would rather be your wife, Jack—Jack, your wife for a day than another's for an eternity!" She quitted the room abruptly, and Shreves sat down and rested his head in his inter-

locked hands. His pulse was quivering, his heart throbbing, as might an untutored savage thrill beneath the strains of music which found an imprisoned echo in his breast. What power did this man possess to evoke such passionate devotion? Did he, Shreves Chilson, possess that power? He lifted his head suddenly, defiantly, as if to challenge comparison of his love with any man's. Naida was standing before him, looking wonderingly down at him. He caught her to his breast and kissed her as he had never kissed mortal before. She pushed him from her with all the force that was in her cold, unyielding nature.

"Don't, Shreves!" she cried, shuddering. "Don't be intense like mamma."

He turned away stung, wounded, repulsed—aye, worse still, disappointed. The devotion was not in her to be evoked. Better ten thousand times that his man's heart had never awakened! There she stood, the artist's model, beautiful as a dream, but oh! what a tiny place she filled in the man's life!

"Shreves," whispered she, creeping to his side, awed by the look in his face which she did not know how to interpret into hunger and despair, "Shreves, would you like me to come to the studio to-morrow and sit for you?"

Oh, delicious panacea of the past! Henceforth less efficacious than the homœopathist's pellet to a raging fever!

He smiled sadly, wearily. What use to try to

explain to her that there was anything in life he craved more than a model?

"Not to-morrow," he said gently, with an undercurrent of bitterness, "I must finish Mr. Baker's winter scene; I need the money. There is nothing intense about that, is there?"

The little thrust glanced off from her as innocuously as it would have done from her marble image in her lover's holy of holies.

"May mamma and I drop in, then, for a few minutes, and watch you paint?" she persisted with a little soft laugh that would not have jarred on the dying.

Shreves thought of the bare walls of his room and the vacant spaces here and there in his studio, and wondered if she would understand why he had taken the pictures down, the pictures out of which her lovely face peeped from beneath blonde wigs, dark wigs, in peasant dress, in queen's robes, in costumes of the Orient, the Occident, ancient, medieval, modern—wondered if she would appreciate the feeling that had led him to shield the woman he loved as he had not done the model he had bowed down before.—No, she would not understand, and he could not explain. He would rehang the pictures before he slept; and when she should come in the morning, she would never suspect how turbulent had been for a few hours the smooth stream of their lives.

Mrs. Dunbar had not returned after her abrupt exit; and long after she had heard Shreves depart

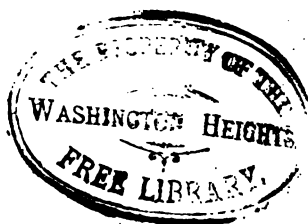
and Naida steal quietly to her room, she lay on a couch drawn before the fire and gazed up into the face of a dark, handsome man looking down upon her from the wall above. Now resting dreamily, now lingering passionately, full of reproach one moment, of tenderest love the next, her eyes devoured the heart-food prepared for her by Shreves Chilson in those early days when Captain Dunbar was his friend and granted him the only reproduction of that handsome, dare-devil face ever accorded to painter or photographer.

It was indeed a handsome face; but sinister and unpleasant to any save love-blinded eyes. The mouth could smile while the fingers throttled an enemy and the eyes gloated over the cruel work, and the lips could curse while the hands were engaged in Samaritan deeds and the eyes overflowed with sympathy. Strange, strange man! More wicked in thoughts than in actions, perhaps; for Fate had more than once saved him from being the murderer in deed that he had been in heart.

No such thoughts crept into the mind of the tender idolater as she prayed in a beseeching, half-audible tone:

"Jack, dear Jack, come back to me! I have disobeyed you, but you will forgive me when I explain all. I am sending Naida out into the world I so long ago abjured for your sake. She is so young, so beautiful, it would be a sin to shadow her life with ours.—Oh, my love, my love! I shall be all alone when Shreves takes her from

me. Have pity, have pity, Jack, and take me with you! I shall not care where I go, what hardships I endure; only take me with you, dearest, and let me always have the sunshine that only comes now, when my heart is ready to burst in the darkness. Oh Jack, what is there in your life to conceal from me beyond the sin and shame and misery I already know?"



CHAPTER XIII.

MISS MORDECK was enjoying the distinction of having given the "most bewildering" ball of the season. Every now and then, while reading the account of it in the morning paper, she broke into merry laughter as she recalled the hopeless confusion into which her guests had been plunged at the very outset. Some of them had struggled valiantly at first to right themselves, but after a while had philosophically accepted the situation and been content to sink with the majority into a pleasant, novel sort of bewilderment.

"The girls," "the doubles," "the duplicates," "the fac-similes," as they had been termed throughout the evening, had resorted to no vulgar practical jokes nor mischievous pranks, and had always been prompt to come to the rescue of any one stranded on the Miss—Miss—by supplying Mordeck or Dunbar, as the case might be. The guests had been the more bewildered by this evident absence of any intention to produce such an effect, and Browné and Naida had been content to leave unaided nature to show what a tangle she could, in a freak, produce.

"Who is she?" Miss Mordeck had been asked something less than five hundred times during the

evening; and she had given to all the same answer more or less lengthened, curtailed or transposed. "She is my guest temporarily, my Dromio for life; the original of Mr. Chilson's Ophelia, with the honor of which some of you credited me for a while; the betrothed model and the model betrothed of the artist, Mr. Chilson, to be transferred to his studio and to his home in New York immediately after Lent."

She had left it optional with Naida whether the evening should be made the threshold of a new life or regarded merely as a stage on which she appeared before the public for a few hours.

True to his prophecy, Shreves had not failed to distinguish between the girls a single time during the evening so long as he was permitted to look straight into their faces; but once he had come upon one of them in the conservatory where the broad leaves of a banana-tree threw wide shadows, and he had been forced to the laughing appeal, "Which is it?"

"Browné Mordeck," Miss Mordeck's voice had replied quickly; but the very promptness itself had caused him to doubt, and he had said dubiously:

"I think you are deceiving me, Naida, for the pleasure of testing your newly discovered power of mimicry; but even here in the shadow I think I can satisfy myself if you will do something for me."

The heart beneath the soft folds designed by

himself had beat irregularly, and his companion had wondered if he did indeed possess some subtle instinct that would render it impossible for her to deceive him.

"Will you do it?" he had asked, bending over her, the dim light not properly interpreting the amused look in his eyes.

"Yes," she had answered, hardly above a whisper.

"Repeat for me again that jingling rhyme you did the other day."

The slight convulsion of the bare white shoulders had been very palpable to Shreves, but he could of course know nothing of the revulsion of feeling that had produced it. She had commenced quickly and nervously:

"'There was a little man and he had a little—'"

"Oh no, that is not the way! Step forward and make your bow and—er—do the thing rightly."

She had obeyed him by moving a step away, curtsying and repeating the lines.

"Ah! thank you; I own to having been a doubting Thomas. I hope you will pardon me, Miss Mordeck."

"Tell me," Browné had cried, with absolute terror in her eyes as she seized him unconsciously by the arm, "tell me how you knew?"

"In the simplest way imaginable: you curtsied, Naida would have bowed—that genuflection would have been an impossibility to her."

Oh, pathos! bathos! To have an imagined secret language of the soul translated into muscular suppleness!

The smile that had puzzled Shreves when he had given her this simple explanation came to her lips again as she dropped the paper containing the brilliant account of her party, and remembered only this one feature of it.

"That is a peculiar smile you are smiling," said Mr. Mordeck, bending his kindly gray eyes upon his daughter.

Browné started, looked up brightly and shook her head. "You need not ask me for my thoughts; they were too complicated."

"My mood is a confidential rather than an inquisitive one," he replied, smiling. "I want to talk about one of your guests of last evening."

"Would it be polite?"

"Quite so, for I have nothing to say but what is complimentary."

"Oh, then, it isn't Naida?"

"No, it is not Miss Dunbar," he said shortly.

"I refer to the artist."

"I noticed that you and Mr. Chilson spent a good part of the evening together. What does your confidential mood lead you to say about him?"

"Mainly that I like him."

As this statement was not followed by another for some little time, Browné and her mother remained in expectant silence.

"I have asked him to make a picture of me."

"Of you, papa! of you; did you say of or for?" cried Browné, leaning forward eagerly.

"Of me," he said, his own face lighting with pleasure at the joyful surprise he noted in the faces of his wife and daughter.

"Oh, Tom!" cried Ethel Mordeck, using the fond, familiar name that only an excess of emotion ever made easy; and she clasped her arms about her husband's neck and felt herself pressed to his heart with a tender abandon now and then effected by a momentary forgetfulness of the shadow between them.

The sensation produced by this simple announcement could have come from but one source—novelty. His rooted aversion to having his features reproduced on paper, card or canvas had puzzled and grieved his wife, and now the sudden conquering of an eccentricity just at a time when such an act would be to her not only a pleasure but a reassurance, filled her heart with a devout thanksgiving which betrayed itself in a depth of emotion that surprised the husband of a score or more of years.

Browné's delight was unbounded, but it was in a lighter vein than her mother's. She was very proud of her father, with his grave, striking face, and she had time and again pleaded for a simple photograph that could have been taken so quickly and easily; but he had always evaded her entreaties. Now he was going to give them a por-

trait, a life-size picture, which would be a never-failing pleasure while he was with them and an untold comfort when he was away.

Shreves Chilson was hardly less pleased than was Mr. Mordeck's family at the prospect of this portrait; but his pleasure was faintly tinged with remorse. He was conscious that his eagerness could not be attributed wholly to the prestige it would give him or to the generous addition it would be to his purse, or even to a reciprocation of the sudden friendship the millionaire had obviously conceived for him. He had been introduced to Mr. Mordeck early in the evening, and from that moment until his departure it required a conscious effort to remove his eyes from his host's face. He had complied eagerly with the half-request, half-demand for the portrait, then felt like a traitor for doing so.

He had arisen the morning after Miss Mordeck's party at nine o'clock from a broken, unrefreshing sleep begun at four and hopelessly ended by eight, had gone to breakfast, and, unseasonable as was the hour, had turned his steps toward Lasalle Avenue. Mrs. Dunbar had received him, and explained apologetically that it was too early to awaken Naida, who was not accustomed to dissipation, and he had listened in an absent-minded way, with his eyes fixed on the portrait he had painted of Captain Dunbar six months before. He had then taken his departure without any sense of disappointment in his morning call.

He was back in his studio again, walking up and down with his hands behind him and a disturbed look in his eyes. He sat down and tried to read the morning papers. They were full of man's wickedness and crime. One more daring piece of villainy than the rest seemed to hold his attention in a fascinated vise, judging from the length of time he dwelt upon it. The pith of the scandal was given in the sensational and voluminous headlines:

"A Little Utah Game Played at in the Heart of the Virtuous Metropolis.

"Two Young Men, Club Acquaintances, Claim the Same Man as their Respective Father.

"A Family in New York and One in Brooklyn.

"An Old Sinner's Security for a Quarter of a Century."

He had read and re-read the dramatic and highly sensational account, and was reading it for the third time, when his valet de chambre and general factotum, Mike, ushered in a visitor unannounced.

When Shreves looked up and saw Mr. Mordeck standing before him, he crushed the paper in his hands, threw it under a table, and advanced with evident confusion.

"You did not expect me so soon?" said Mr. Mordeck with a pleasant smile. Then, without waiting for an answer, he continued: "Vanity, when given an outlet, is of so o'er-floodgate a nature that, having been caught in the current,

one must be content to accept whatever folly he drifts into."

"You would like me to begin on the portrait at once?" said Shreves, the fact of his desiring to avoid that subject leading him straight up to it in his strange disconcertion.

"As you please about that. But the object of my call this morning is to make your acquaintance in your studio. I never knew an artist before."

"Your time is pretty thoroughly taken up with your business?" suggested Shreves, hating himself for seeming to pry into this man's affairs, yet not seeing how he could have said less.

"Yes, I am a pretty busy man, and have never had much time for cultivating men merely for the pleasure of their friendship."

Shreves bowed; he did not know how to bandy compliments with this grave, unworldly man. But he knew how to make a visit to his studio attractive and interesting, and he proceeded to do so.

A half-hour sufficed to develop the man of business into a Mæcenæ. He wanted to buy everything on the walls, and to leave orders unlimited. One notable exception to this wholesale desire for the young artist's work was anything suggestive of Naida Dunbar. A landscape, however beautiful, received only a glance from him if Naida were in the fore- or background. He of course did not betray his antipathy in words while in the presence of his host, but a suspicion became an assur-

ance with Shreves when he took his visitor into the third room of the suite, whose walls were transformed into countless mirrors reflecting one face. His aversion was so open, despite an effort to compliment and commend the artist's devotion to his betrothed, that Shreves felt more puzzled than resentful.

With the rehanging of the pictures in the temporarily bared spaces, Shreves had withdrawn from its exposed position the easel on which stood his unframed Actæon. He had so disposed it that a subdued light brought out more keenly, but less mercilessly, the human terror in the eyes of the bayed stag; and though not every chance visitor might see the picture, it was a predestined reward for those whose search revealed it to them.

Mr. Mordeck found it, and paused to examine it more closely than he had done any other picture.

"Do you detect a resemblance?"

"Very readily," said Mr. Mordeck, without removing his eyes from the picture.

"Too marked, do you think?"

"To be natural, or to please the young lady, do you mean?"

"To be natural."

"No, we can all find a crude prototype in some of the lower animals."

"Through Darwinism or the doctrine of transmigration?"

"Neither. Through a simple resemblance to be traced in all of nature's work."

"You do not think, then, that my Actæon retains too much of his human appearance after transformation?"

"Not, as I said before, to be natural, if the fair model does not object."

"Oh! Naida's face belongs to me to do with as I please."

"I beg your pardon," said Mr. Mordeck, as if waving aside an inconsequent evasion, "those eyes are not Miss Dunbar's, they are my daughter's."

"They were at least supposed to be hers when I made use of them," retorted Shreves quickly, his words containing no ambiguity for Mr. Mordeck.

"Ah-h!" said Mr. Mordeck, then smiled. "Doubtless you saw this look in them when she thought she was being pursued by a madman." He smiled again, and seemed oblivious to the effect this observation had upon his companion.

"Is this picture purchasable?" he inquired with a gravity misconstrued by the artist.

"By Miss Mordeck's father it is," said Shreves, coloring with pride and anger. It had never occurred to him that he could deliberately sell this picture; but his only thought now was to prove to the millionaire that he attached no sentimental value to it, that consideration alone for Miss Mordeck had prevented his classing it with his marketable work.

"I will give you five thousand dollars for it."

Shreves was silent; from neither surprise nor gratitude, however; his father also was a rich man, and though he himself might some day be a disinherited son, he was not one as yet, and he had never felt the full responsibility of independence. He was taking a grim sort of pleasure in thus coldly negotiating the sale of a picture in the execution of which he had put something more than mere talent, and he was trying to analyze the sensation.

Mr. Mordeck could not be expected to follow the artist's erratic thoughts, and he translated his silence into a practical, monetary significance.

"Is that not enough?" he inquired tentatively.

"Enough?" repeated Shreves with a twisted inflection that struck Mr. Mordeck as being peculiar without awakening any surmises; "I am generously paid."

"If you are satisfied, I am." He took out his check-book and looked around for a desk or table.

A pen and ink stood on the table under which Shreves had thrust the paper. Mr. Mordeck moved over to it and sat down. He drew the paper out from under the table, folded, smoothed it, and rested his check-book immediately below the flaming and sensational headlines over which Shreves had been poring when he came. Shreves noticed him as he ran his eye calmly over them while he held his pen suspended. He dipped the pen in the ink, filled out a check for five thousand

dollars, dated, numbered and signed it with a firm, legible hand, handed it to Shreves, and rose from the table.

"Great God! is the man made of stone?" thought Shreves, withdrawing his eyes with difficulty from the grave, unreadable face.

"I have enjoyed my call," said Mr. Mordeck, preparing to go, "and I shall repeat it as often as you will allow me. My home has heretofore been my only pleasure-resort. We can make arrangements about the portrait the next time I call. By the way, my wife and daughter are enchanted at the idea of the portrait. I have never had a picture taken before. Drop in at my office some time.—Good-morning!"

CHAPTER XIV.

WHEN Mr. Mordeck had gone Shreves stood for a moment lost in unpleasant thoughts, then began a disquieted walk with his hands behind him and his forehead knit in deep lines.

"I can't do it; it is a false position and I wont be placed in it.—I wont accept his invitation.—I'll not paint his portrait.—He is a fool to play with fire in that way.—Is it a bluff game he would play? Jove! he does it well.—It is a challenge—a bold one, but I accept it, Mr. Mordeck."

"Things are seldom what they seem," he began whistling softly, and withdrawing his hands from behind him he unfolded the slip of paper he still held.

That the check had no connection in his thoughts with the problematic sentiment of the air he had just whistled was plainly discernable in his face as he glanced at the yet undried signature.

"Five thousand dollars! Five thousand dollars and an order for a portrait and a half-dozen landscapes of sizes and scenes to be chosen by myself. Can this be in the nature of a bribe?—To the devil with your patronage! I will do my duty if—"

Shreves is not the only person that has been

called to a sudden halt by that diminutive sentinel, and it was a very obstinate and fatal *if* he had run up against. There were five hearts to be bruised or broken, according to their several powers of endurance and the weight of the blow upon each.

Was it his duty to sacrifice five innocent persons in order to punish one guilty one? Might not a deception of more than twenty years be kept up for life? And who was there to be injured by it beyond what was already irreparable?

He succeeded in a very short time in getting himself entangled in a moral maze that rendered work out of the question. He put on his hat and topcoat and went down on the street. He walked at a perfunctory, time-killing gait, his surroundings making no conscious impression upon him until he found himself in the midst of State Street shoppers and promenaders, and an ulstered figure a short distance ahead of him caught his attention. A few rapid strides brought him alongside its wearer.

"My parlor-car companion!" was his semi-exclamatory greeting as he raised his hat and fell in with her step.

"You have cause to remember this ulster," Miss Mordeck said hastily, without further greeting.

"A far more agreeable one, I fear, than you have," he returned lightly.

"Agreeable?" repeated she with irony not passing good breeding. "I do not think it would have

occurred to one situated as I was to apply that term to the position. Traveling alone with a supposed lunatic, and being thrown into hysterics, almost, by his familiarity and boldness, and losing one's best friend because of—" she cut short this last and unjust accusation, remembering that it was the picture that had caused the quarrel between Dr. Royster and herself, and for this mistake nature and not Mr. Chilson was responsible.

Her hesitation was lost in Shreves' interruption.

"My dear Miss Mordeck, you don't mean to tell me ~~that~~ all that happened? What could I have done to upset the nerves of a young lady? I am sure I was civil, for you know I mistook you for my *fiancée* and—Look here, Miss Mordeck, 'pon my word I don't remember, but did I—did I kiss—Naida good-by?" His twitching mouth belied the gravity of his tone, and Browné realized that Shreves Chilson was too much a man of the world to feel that he had sinned irredeemably. He misunderstood the angry tears that sprang to her eyes, and remembering the "offended best friend," said anxiously:

"Did any one see me? Might I not explain to your friend?"

"Considering the time that has elapsed, it is rather fortunate, perhaps, that no explanation was necessary," she returned in a semi-sarcastic tone which Shreves could attribute only to resentment at himself for having been the cause of, at least, a short and harmless lovers' quarrel.

He looked at her with new interest. He had supposed of course that she would in time select some one from among her numerous suitors upon whom to bestow her wealth and beauty, but he had never before thought of her as having already made the choice. He wondered what sort of man he was; whether large or small, dark or fair, old or young, rich or poor, scholarly or commonplace. What sort of a man would a girl like Miss Mordeck admire? The gravity of the result that might have come of his mistake seemed at last to impress him, and his manner was very earnest and respectful when he broke the momentary silence that had fallen between them.

"Miss Mordeck, I do not know how to apologize or atone for the trouble and annoyance I have caused you. I never thought of it as anything more than a romantic escapade in your life, which was rather enjoyable than otherwise on account of its novelty and mystery."

"Do you think there was much enjoyment to be gotten out of constant anticipation of being claimed in all sorts of public places by a crazy admirer who possessed such damaging proofs of my denied acquaintance with him as an unlimited number of my portraits?" demanded Miss Mordeck with angry rapidity.

"The Blake-like genius with which I was accredited explained the pictures satisfactorily," said he in self-defense.

"To the few who know who and what Blake

was; but how many of my acquaintances, do you suppose, ever heard of him? Psychology is not a fad much affected in our set."

Shreves felt that she had reason to be indignant with him, and he was very meek and good-natured under her sarcasm.

"The reporter," continued she, "would never have thought of that charitable, romantic explanation had he not seen the books I was reading in the Public Library and heard my excited argument with Tom. I was fresh from an interview with Hammond, Clouston, Descartes and all those noted authorities, and I talked very glibly about insanity, its phases and phrases."

"How did you diagnose my case?" said he with sudden curiosity.

"As an aggravated form of delusional epilepsy."

"Phew-w!" exclaimed he in disgust. "Did you think I had fits and—er—all that?"

"Convulsive epilepsy is only one form of that comprehensive malady," returned Miss Mordeck with explanatory condescension. "There is another phase of it less repulsive and more satisfactory to those inclined to take a romantic view of insanity; it is called epilepsie larvée (masked epilepsy), and nine-tenths of the marked eccentricities of the world at large might be accounted for professionally in this way. Many of the peculiarities, inconsistencies and inexplicable actions in the lives of our fellow-mortals could be explained on this hypothesis if we would take them as symp-

toms of diseased brains, just as we accept physical abnormalities as signs of bodily ills; but we are so uncharitably constituted that we are readier to attribute weakness, immorality and crime to depravity than to insanity."

Shreves winced beneath this as if it had been a conscious thrust at his hasty judgment of the fair denunciator's father. He knew that no such application of her theory had been made by herself, but it awakened a train of thought in his mind that promised to render the study of insanity as interesting to him as it had been to her a few weeks before.

"You have piqued my interest in a subject I confess my ignorance of," he said, attesting his earnestness by his tone and manner, "and if you will tell me just how you handled my supposed case of lunacy—how you went about studying it, developing it, finding corroborative testimony, etc., etc., I shall be indebted to you for more than merely a few moments of pleasant and instructive conversation."

Miss Mordeck hesitated; this was indeed heroic treatment for even so aggravated a case of weakness as her own, and while she did not mean to shirk it, she wondered how much she could tell without implying more and how far she could trust to his state of non-suspicion. She reflected that love and indifference are typical of dissimilar forms of optical defectiveness, and trusting to the blindness that was a painful but reassuring puzzle

to her, she undertook the explanation in as matter-of-fact tone as she could command. She reached the end of her recital and the wide stone steps of her home at the same time, and they stood there in silence a moment after he had declined her invitation to come in. Had Shreves been less preoccupied, or had his thoughts not been centered upon one idea to which he was fitting every new scrap of information, he might have discovered something more than a calm, scientific pursuit of knowledge in Miss Mordeck's dip into metaphysics. But, as it was, the impression she created was entirely such as her pride would have approved.

The case she had made out against him was interesting and plausible, and he had been amused and entertained by her girlish and lucid handling of a weighty subject. Lilian Atherton's letter had been quoted to him almost verbatim, and he had recognized the damaging evidence it had been against himself and been duly impressed by the coincidence. Altogether the recital had been easier and more pleasant than she had anticipated, and she felt that henceforth she would possess for Shreves Chilson an individuality of her own, and no longer be regarded merely as a duplicate of the woman he loved.

"Miss Mordeck, may I call some time soon, when I am better prepared to sustain my part of the argument, and continue our discussion of insanity?" he said as they parted; and she assented

cordially, thinking that insanity would be a safe topic to be discussed between herself and Naida Dunbar's affianced, especially since she had made her dangerous confession without awaking suspicion.

On his way home Shreves stopped in at the Public Library and boldly asked for the books which Miss Mordeck had examined.

He selected one at random, and noting a unique bookmark toward the back of the eight-hundred-page volume, smiled and took care not to displace the single long dark hair as he turned to the page thus silently attested to as having been studied by Miss Mordeck a short time before.

The waved dark line made by the hair inclosed as within a single parenthetic curve sixteen lines near the center of the page, then strayed down irregularly and curled over the edge to be a guide to Shreves Chilson in the fateful task he had set himself. The fortuitous parenthesis was as follows:

"In cases of epileptic mania such as I have cited, there is in one sense a loss of consciousness, but in another sense the consciousness remains. There is a loss of the knowledge of the relations of the individual to the world and of his own identity, but he is conscious at the time of all that occurs during his paroxysms, although when this is over he has no recollection of his former state of consciousness. There are, in fact, two states of consciousness, in neither of which has he any

recollection of the other. Several cases of prolonged double consciousness have been reported. In these the individuals led separate and distinct lives, knew different people, had different habits, and were possessed of different mental characteristics in each state. In each of these periods the individual was conscious, but he had no recollection, in one state of consciousness, of any circumstance which took place in the other."

Shreves read and re-read the paragraph, and noted with a feeling akin to superstition that through all his agitation, nervousness, excitement and shifting of the book, Browné Mordeck's dark clinging hair encircled the words, mayhaps protectingly, perhaps defiantly, but through all persistently. He read the cited cases referred to, and learned that there are more incredible things in the realm of psychology than he had ever dreamed of in his practical existence, and that the idea being timidly formulated in his mind was, instead of a phenomenon to be accounted for upon hypothetical bases, a simple prognosed, diagnosed, familiar occurrence in the experience and observation of the medical profession. A vague, fancied possibility had been transformed by a little knowledge into a cold, pitiless probability, and he closed the book and rested his arms on it for a moment.

"God help these women, whether their husband be a villain or a lunatic!"

CHAPTER XV.

THERE was no longer any hesitancy in Shreves' acceptance of the rôle assigned him by Fate. He did not know whether he was destined to prove a Nemesis or a benefactor to the man that had crossed his path and turned to seek his friendship; but neither this nor the dread result of absolute knowledge could allay the tumult of curiosity, wonder, doubt and fear awakened by his dark suspicions. He did not know what use he would make of the knowledge when acquired, but an influence stronger than his will impelled him toward the certainty from which he shrank with all the fear, regret and remorse his position heaped upon him.

Would his discovery add one more blight to the life he would have shielded with his own, or would it turn to ashes a life hitherto all roses? To Naida he could make some atonement, but to Miss Mordeck there was nothing he could give in exchange for the fair name of which he would rob her. Thinking merely of the two girls, he could almost have wished that the burden might fall upon his betrothed's shoulders—he could lift it so easily, and Naida's was not a nature to writhe beneath a weight that had been removed. But when he thought of Naida's mother and the illim-

itable love which she had shown him the human heart was capable of, a benumbing terror and awe seized upon him and threatened to stop him short in the plain path of duty.

The simple and romantic solution of the problem by assuming that Nature had duplicated her handiwork in the father as well as in the daughter had of course presented itself to him; but with all his eagerness to credit such a possibility, the thought could not gain even temporary hold in his mind. Every incident in the lives of the two men, and he had gleaned not a few while the portrait was in progress, pointed to a single identity. He had resorted to no shrewd or preconceived methods of winning Mr. Mordeck's confidence, and had gained no information other than the natural outcome of congeniality between artist and sitter. But as he stood before his easel, transferring to canvas with eager, steady strokes the features of the man who affected him with a peculiar blending of confidence and mistrust, he had learned more of the life masked by that grave, strong face than had been confided to any other mortal.

One day, toward the last of the sittings, Mr. Mordeck stood beside the easel looking down at the artist with an expression in his eyes such as his own son might have evoked, and said musingly: "You ought to be pretty familiar with my face by this time, my young friend."

"I think I know every line in it," Shreves re-

plied gravely. He had never been able to conquer the traitorous feeling that sometimes overcame him in the presence of his patron, and he found it necessary to fight continually against the fascination that inclined him toward leniency rather than justice in passing judgment upon the life of the man who daily plead his own cause before the bar of Shreves' heart and conscience in the presence of the conflicting jury of his doubts, fears, hopes, wishes, affection, admiration, suspicion, belief, distrust, regret, remorse and duty.

"You think you know every line of my face, do you?" smiled Mr. Mordeck. "Have you discovered every curve, also? I don't mean contour exactly."

Shreves looked up inquiringly, and Mr. Mordeck ran his fingers through his hair, lifting it off his forehead and revealing an oval indenture beginning at the edge of the hair and running back an inch or more.

"What did that?"

"A fragment of a bomb. My war record lies buried in this small grave. That was my first, last, and only battle."

"You were a Union man?"

"Yes; but I did not do much for my cause. I went to sleep in a hospital in '62 and awoke in the same place in '65."

"Why, how was that? You don't mean you were there all th—"

"This is an excellent piece of work, Chilson,"

said Mr. Mordeck, as if no subject other than the portrait had been broached. "I am not much of a judge, but it seems to me you have a brilliant future before you."

"I wish my father thought the same," replied Shreves, in nowise surprised but deeply puzzled at the sudden turning of the conversation. All he had gleaned of Mr. Mordeck's past life had been picked up in stray, unguarded bits of information such as had just been dropped.

"What sort of a man is your father? I can't imagine a man not being proud of a son like you," said Mr. Mordeck with unworldly candor, and Shreves smiled and shook his head.

One of the peculiarities of the millionaire's friendship for the artist was the flattering selfishness of it. He recognized no social or friendly claims his family might have upon Mr. Chilson, but appropriated him exclusively for his own pleasure, entertainment and gratification. He never invited Shreves to his home in Michigan Avenue save as a disinterested bearer of a message from his wife and daughter, but he came often to the studio and extended to the artist invitations innumerable to drop in at his office. Chilson was to him essentially a man friend, congenial, refreshing and admirable in his character, youth and ambition, and it never occurred to Mr. Mordeck that there might be any reason why he should not patronize and admire and make as much of this young friend as his pleasure and inclination dictated.

- Shreves understood Mr. Mordeck's friendship without in the least comprehending what there was in himself to have called it forth; and had it not been for his repellent suspicions he would have taken keen pleasure and pride in the older man's evident admiration and affection for him. As it was, he was always doing battle against a feeling which he termed fascination, but which was strangely like respect and love. He seldom evaded his patron's compliments; for a denial only brought forth more highly colored praise, and a dubious shake of the head or a laughing deprecation was the safest and least embarrassing answer to frank convictions like the above.

"I am sure your father must be proud of you," reiterated Mr. Mordeck gravely.

"No, he is not," said Shreves, laughing. "He is very far from being proud of me; indeed, he says he could have forgiven me for making a fool of myself in any other way than by making pictures."

"Why shouldn't you make your money in the most congenial way possible?"

"There is where the fault lies. Lucre and Art are shrines worshiped at by different devotees."

"You have found your profession lucrative, have you not?"

"Since you became my patron, yes, but—"

"But my wants will all be supplied after a time, you are going to say?"

"No; I was going to say that I cannot accept

even from you any more such generous sums as you paid for my Actæon. My work is not such as to command such prices, and your lavish generosity partakes of the nature of charity."

"Tut, tut! what is the advantage of being rich if one must consider the practical worthiness of every whim he chooses to gratify?"

"I am a sort of hobby with you, then, am I?" laughed Shreves.

"A luxury, rather," replied Mr. Mordeck.

"An expensive one, I fear."

"Not so expensive as a single one of my sprees sometimes proves."

"Your what!"

"I wonder what power there is in you to have evoked that confession from me?" said he musingly. "It certainly never crossed my lips before."

"And unjustly this time, I am sure," said Shreves with conviction as he closely scanned the older man's face.

"Maybe so; but I don't know any other way to account for certain things."

"Have you consulted a physician?" This was dangerous ground, and Shreves walked with bated breath.

"Garrard, I think, is at a loss to decide whether it is opium, morphine, or whisky," Mr. Mordeck said, without directly replying to Shreves' question.

"Why do you not tell him?"

"Because I do not know myself!—There, Chil-

son, you have the secret of my life; God knows why I have surrendered it to you!"

"For some wise purpose, be assured," said Shreves, grasping Mr. Mordeck's hand and speaking in an impressed tone. He was carried away by the awe and gravity of the moment, and believed that he was destined to lift the shadow from his patron's life.

"O God, that men should put an enemy in their mouths to steal away their brains!" repeated itself over and over again in his mind and poured a flood of light in upon the darkness that had enveloped so many lives. Not a villain, not a lunatic, but the victim of a simple, ordinary, curable habit which, having been discovered, admitted of treatment with the probable and speedy restoration to his family—which family?

The mental shock left Shreves trembling. Happiness to one family meant misery to the other; honor to one meant degradation to the other; and, oh, irony of fate, the reaction of the blow, wherever it should fall, would strike with equal heaviness upon his own heart. On the one side he gave friendship, admiration and pity; on the other side, sympathy, love and partial atonement. To which would knowledge prove less of a curse?

"I trust it may be—for some wise purpose, as you suggested," explained Mr. Mordeck in answer to Shreves' puzzled look. "Where have your thoughts been all this time?"

"With you and your—loved ones," Shreves replied with scarcely a perceptible hesitation. "You must pardon my silence, Mr. Mordeck, but your words have set me to thinking."

"I trust your thinking will be to some purpose; twenty-five years of my own thoughts have accomplished nothing," interrupted he bitterly.

"Perhaps your thinking has been unaccompanied by action?"

"So it has been; I have never before known any one whom I could trust,—any one who could be of service to me, I mean,—and action means confidence reposed somewhere. Are you willing to assume the burden?"

The question was direct, abrupt, and seemingly wrung from an unwilling speaker.

"I think I understand what you want," said Shreves, the more readily comprehending from his recently acquired knowledge of double consciousness whether produced by alcohol, opium or epilepsy. "You would like me to accompany you on one of these—ah—unexplained absences?"

"Why mince matters? I want you to follow me through one of these sprees, and see how I get rid of so much money, and where and in what way I make a fool and beast of myself."

Shreves shrank back appalled at the demand made of him, or perhaps at the manner in which it was made inasmuch as he was anticipating it.—Mr. Mordeck seemed not to have the slightest suspicion of the truth, and a realization of it

might lead to some desperate deed. Shreves felt like protesting against the whole thing now that it had reached this point. Why not delay the discovery as long as possible? The secret might lie buried under another score of years, and in the mean time some of them, or all of them, might die—and in the mean time, also, a third and disinterested party might discover the facts and handle them more rudely than he would do. Duty, friendship, every emotion of his heart and conscience demanded that he should seek the knowledge that might be dangerous for him to possess, but fatal for another.

He had no word of encouragement, however, to offer Mr. Mordeck as he accepted the mission assigned him. He could not say that he hoped the discovery would be less humiliating than was anticipated, for he knew that the victim of this will- and conscience-deadening malady had no conception of the revelation in store for him.

"You will do this for me?" Mr. Mordeck said, laying his hands on the younger man's shoulders and compelling a direct look.

"Yes, I will do it; and Heaven grant you may never regret it!"

"Oh, I shall not, I am sure! I feel a weight lifted from me already. Perhaps if I could have stifled pride and summoned courage enough to take this step long years ago, I should have spared myself and family much unhappiness. Come, let's find a more cheerful topic."

"Wait one moment; how am I to know when you need me?" said Shreves.

"I will come straight to you. An intense craving for wine always gives me timely warning."

The effort at light conversation was a failure, and they tacitly admitted it by drifting into silence. Mr. Mordeck shortly after arose and prepared to go.

"You can't think of any other excuse just now that will necessitate my presence here for an hour or two every few days, can you?" he inquired with a grave smile.

"Not unless you will let me make another portrait of you," laughed Shreves.

"I can't own to such stupendous conceit."

"How would you like to pose as a model?" Shreves asked, laughing at the audacity of the question rather than at the question itself, inasmuch as millionnaires are not wont to pose as models for impecunious artists and for the gratification of disinherited sons.

"Could you really utilize me in that way?" he asked in all seriousness.

"I could indeed. I might paint you as St. Somebody or other."

"No, I want more of a disguise than that," said he with the grim humor that cropped up now and then in his serious, suppressed nature.

"How about Lear, then?"

"Lear was a sort of crazy fool of a king, wasn't he?"

"When clothed in his right mind he was, perhaps," laughed Shreves, "but when he became really insane he was a very grand character."

"What sort of a picture are you going to make?"

"What scene shall I represent, do you mean? I hadn't thought of it until this moment, but I believe I could make a very effective thing of King Lear's lament over the body of his murdered daughter. Do you think Miss Mordeck would kindly consent to be Cordelia?"

"She would if I were to ask her; but if she must simulate death I think I would rather look down day after day upon the face of Miss Dunbar than of my Browné."

"In that case I fear your grief would not be profound enough," said Shreves with angry significance.

"I beg your pardon, Chilson, upon my word I do! I never can remember that Miss Dunbar is your betrothed; she has always seemed to me merely an unnecessary and provoking duplicate of my beautiful Browné."

"Which is precisely my unfortunate feeling toward Miss Mordeck," admitted Shreves with less ambiguity of tone than words.

"You don't say so? Well now, that's a pity; for Browné likes you, I am sure."

"Miss Mordeck does me an honor."

"You are angry and sarcastic, my young friend," said Mr. Mordeck with the quiet forbearance of age to youth. "I don't pretend to be able to

understand the likes and dislikes of you young people; but of one thing I am certain, there shall be no coldness springing up between you and me that can be kept down by explanations on my part, and apologies if necessary."

Shreves seized Mr. Mordeck's hand and wrung it repentantly. "Such friendship and affection would be acceptable to any young man, but are doubly so to a discarded son."

"I repeat, my dear boy, I can't understand what sort of a man your father is. I couldn't ask more of Tom than that he should be just such a young fellow as you are.—Well, well!" mused Mr. Mordeck, and took his leave without putting any more of his thoughts into words.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHEN Mr. Mordeck had gone, Shreves settled down on his couch with the determination to sift his doubts, suspicions, hypotheses and smattering of knowledge in order to ascertain what positive material he had for the theory that had set him at war with himself and all those he loved and admired.

That Thomas Mordeck could not be a villain and consciously lead a double life Shreves had decided ere he had known him a week. In the light of the criminal record such an assumption would have been to a stranger the simplest and most plausible that could have suggested itself; but it was untenable ground to those who knew the chief actor in this strange life drama.

If not a villain, then a lunatic. A double life he assuredly led, and if he could not do so consciously he did so unconsciously; and this unconsciousness argued an unsound mind. Shreves' superficial study of insanity betrayed him into the error of assuming for single effects single causes. Double consciousness he had discovered to be the effect of masked epilepsy; therefore, according to his hasty but possibly correct reasoning, Mr. Mordeck's double life branded him a victim of this

direful malady. Whereupon the evidence, statistics, facts and theories that follow in the train of an accepted hypothesis began to pour in upon him and fix him immovably in the conclusion he had reached.

Nothing had occurred to shake his confidence in the position he occupied until Mr. Mordeck's confession of that morning. Might not opium, as well as epilepsy, produce a double consciousness? Would not that explain the long interval of blankness in the hospital between the years '62 and '65? It was hardly probable that a soldier would be retained in a hospital three years for so slight a wound as Mr. Mordeck's had been, and the blank for which he could not account was most likely produced by a yielding to a habit which had been contracted while suffering from the injury of a fractured skull. His waking up in the same hospital three years afterward was no proof that he had been there all the time.

Shreves dwelt upon this new phase of the subject with eagerness mixed with chagrin, until he reflected that the result was the same whether from opium or epilepsy, and then all other emotions were swallowed up in sympathy for the unconscious victims. In the midst of his sorrowful perplexity the remembrance of another case of mistaken insanity intruded, and he laughed unmirthfully at the gruesome coincidence.

"One never profits by another's experience," he said aloud, and got up and walked over to the

easel on which stood the newly finished portrait. He gazed long and earnestly at it, with a subdued excitement in his manner that betrayed the deep hold upon his mind this mystery had taken. His perplexed thoughts shaped themselves into a mental apostrophe.

"Your daughter made out a stronger case of insanity against me than I have been able to do against you; yet what a tiny ray of light sufficed to scatter the darkness into which her weeks of study, thought and worry had plunged her! What if you were to appear before me at this moment and demand my attendance upon you, and I should discover that those mysterious absences, those unaccounted-for intervals, were passed in an opium den, and that your periodical disappearances and Captain Dunbar's periodical returns are merely another gruesome coincidence? Where would be all my fine theories then of masked epilepsy, my positive assertion of a single identity, my scientific applications of double consciousness? Ha, ha, ha! If there must be a lunatic in this affair I think it is Miss Mordeck who was on the right trail!"

Shreves' temples were throbbing and his nerves strung to a tension of which he was not conscious. He seized a palette and brush and, replacing the portrait with a clean bit of canvas, began dashing bits of paint here and there. His model was before him as plainly as was ever that of the imaginative Blake; and the figure evolved from

memory, thought and imagination reproduced itself on the canvas through the medium of his rapid, unerring strokes almost without his volition.

The picture grew and grew, while the hours flew by unheeded and Nature rebelled in vain, until darkness closed around the artist and his work, and a cheery voice broke in upon his inspiration.

"Eh, old fellow, are you too poor to waste a foot or two of gas?" The newcomer struck a match and turned on a double blaze of light. "Bless me! Chilson, are you ill?"

Shreves threw himself back in his chair and pressed his hands over his eyes and temples. "I believe I have overworked myself. I had no idea it was so late."

"Haven't had a bite of dinner, I wager?"

"Nor lunch either."

"The mischief you haven't! What do you mean by such suicidal tomfoolery?"

"A suicidal impulse is one symptom of insanity," repeated Shreves mechanically. "I think it very probable that I have been crazy all the afternoon."

"I have had my doubts about your sanity ever since that fool reporter announced his discovery!" Shreves' visitor exclaimed in disgust. "What have you been doing now?" He turned the full glare of an unglobed jet upon the rough but well-developed figure on the canvas, and demanded in a crescendo key: "Who the dickens is that?"

"King Lear, unhoused and unconditioned, railing against the warring elements."

"Humph! it looks mightily like Dunbar with a grand and glorious 'jag' on him."

The blood coursing through Shreves' veins at fever heat seemed suddenly to congeal about his heart, and his face was white as death as he seized a wide brush and a pot of black paint and blotted the picture from existence.

Ned Dougherty, an athletic young giant, put a brawny fist through the smeared canvas, kicked over the easel, and deposited the artist on a couch. Taken completely by surprise, and his thoughts receiving this timely diversion, Shreves lay on his couch and gazed in amazement at the destructive son of Anak.

"You needed a vent," said Dougherty explanatorily as he towered above the couch and looked down with diminishing concern upon his overwrought friend. "Are you trying to get up a case of brain fever to soften your father's heart?"

Shreves did not answer directly, but said instead: "Was that picture really like Captain Dunbar?"

"Now you just let that subject rest," said Dougherty with dictatorial slowness. "I forgot what the jolly captain is to you when I said what I did, and I don't know what to do but just ask your pardon."

"Never mind that—I understand—but answer my question, was it like him?"

"So like him at his very worst that it was a charity to destroy it."

The two friends were silent for several minutes, then began talking about other things.

Dougherty strode in and out the room once or twice, retailed gossip of the ring, field and turf—preferred by Shreves secondhand—and made himself thoroughly entertaining in his way, which was a way that Shreves enjoyed occasionally because of the contrast to the refined, intellectual life he himself led. A rap was answered by the self-appointed host, and ere Shreves could get off his couch or comprehend what was taking place, a tray was deposited on a table in front of him.

"This isn't the sort of stuff I built up this physique on, but it's what you daintier fellows like," said Dougherty, expanding his broad chest and striking his biceps proudly.

Shreves could not speak for a moment. Weak from fasting and nervous from excitement, this womanly thoughtfulness on the part of his rough, big-hearted, underbred friend touched him deeply. When the process of devouring was fairly under headway, Dougherty prepared to go.

"You will be all right now," he said cheerily. "I've got an engagement, but I wanted to see this before I let you out from under my eye."

Shreves felt refreshed and strengthened after his broken fast, and remembering that he too had an engagement, prepared to go out. The throbbing of his temples had given way to a dull aching,

and he noticed as he brushed his hair before the mirror that he was pale and hollow-eyed. To nature's hint he replied involuntarily aloud, "Naida expects me!" then fell to wondering why he should have urged upon himself this excuse. Naida always expected him, for that matter, and his coming and going were wholly unceremonious. A month ago he would not have thought of such punctiliousness; he would have consulted his own feelings and remained in his room and retired early. But now things were different and he could not account for the change. Nothing had been quite the same since he had known Miss Mordeck. She was an exasperating physical reproduction of his betrothed, but was full of contradictions and inharmonious qualities—or so they seemed to him because they were antithetic to Naida's nature, and he had learned to associate certain pronounced and invariable characteristics with that duplicated face and form.

The prejudice and injustice he could not recognize in himself were readily detected by him in Mrs. Dunbar, and the mother's jealous fears opened his eyes to worldly conceived possibilities that first jarred upon him, then angered him, and finally were accepted as natural. Avarice and ambition might prove potent enemies to loyalty in some natures, but his own security precluded resentment at the imputation.

His disquieted mental condition—disquieted because of Mr., and not Miss, Mordeck—visibly

affected Naida; and when she noticed on two or three successive evenings that her most artistic gowns evoked no more comment than a street dress, she ceased to don them. She realized that for the time being her occupation was gone, and she awaited its return with serene inactivity.—She did not know how to be sullen, any more than she realized that there is a time in the life of every man, even an artist's, when he needs and wants a sympathetic, womanly companion rather than a pedestaled idol.

He was dimly conscious of this without being enough so to render it a conscious disloyalty, as he stood on the corner trying to account for his inclination to take a south-bound car instead of walking with his former eager stride toward the pretty north-side home in Lasalle Avenue. The only explanation that suggested itself was his peculiar and unwonted mood. His mind was too much harassed with puzzling doubts and disastrous possibilities to admit of lovers' raptures, and he was sick of art. Consequently he could look forward to nothing in the next hour or so to be spent with his *fiancée*; whereas, if he had been going to call upon Miss Mordeck, he would have been in a state of agreeable uncertainty as to whether he was to be entertained with personalities, gossip, a dissertation on Volapük, Lenten missionary work, insanity, or what. He could have amused himself on the way there by hazarding guesses as to the mood he would find her in. If

she were meek, he knew how to put her on her mettle; if haughty, he could bend her; if on the heights, he could depress her; if in the depths, he could lift her up; proud, saucy, cynical, enthusiastic, yielding, combative, charmingly foolish or sedately wise—each one, all, she could be within one short hour, and so bewilder him as to make it as impossible for him to choose his mood as for a child to decide between kaleidoscopic views.

A stiff breeze from the lake aided duty in making a decision, and he looked at a south-bound car, sighed, turned and walked rapidly away in the opposite direction, his thoughts keeping pace with his long strides in the form of the wearying problem as to what he was to do with the knowledge when he discovered beyond a doubt that Thomas A. Mordeck and Captain Jack Dunbar were one and the same man.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE relief experienced by Shreves from his temporary uncertainty about the calamity hovering over his friends was of short duration. That the mysterious disappearances of Mr. Mordeck and reappearances of Captain Dunbar could be merely coincidental he could not bring himself to believe. Notwithstanding the almost physical identity between Browné Mordeck and Naida Dunbar, he could not accept the possibility of a repeated freak of nature in the resemblance between the two men.

Consciously or unconsciously, through villainy, opium or epilepsy, the father of the two girls twinned by nature if not by birth led a double life, and whichever way he turned Shreves could see nothing but sin in secrecy, misery in confession.

Shrouded in mental, moral and physical darkness, he rang the door-bell and was admitted into the light by Captain Dunbar himself.

A few hours ago Mr. Mordeck stood in his presence, grave, melancholy, clerical in his manner and attire. Here stood Captain Dunbar, smiling, dashing, youthful-looking, and clothed after the manner of a man of fashion.

Shreves was dazed; he felt as might have done a shipwrecked man thrown on an unhopd-for

island where all had seemed to him engulfing waters. How could he ever have supposed the two men to be the same? What demon of suspicion, cynicism, or evil conscience could have—

"You don't seem especially glad to see me," said Captain Dunbar with a mocking laugh. "Come in; I shall be here but a little while."

Shreves recovered himself, greeted his father-in-law-elect with as much cordiality as he could summon on so short a notice, and went in with him.

Mrs. Dunbar was radiant; Naida, depressed. He crossed over to the side of his betrothed as soon as he had spoken to her mother.

"What is the matter, sweetheart?" he asked lightly. The reaction from his gloomy, fatal suspicions affected him like absinthe. His eyes were bright, his smile ready, his voice jubilant, his heart elated. The look he bent upon Naida seemed to chill instead of warm her, and she shrank from him.

"He affects you as he does mamma and everybody else except me. I am afraid of him, I—"

"Of whom, your father?"

"Yes; papa. His presence is unnaturally exhilarating. He makes me sing and play and laugh and dance and keeps me in a giddy whirl so long as his eyes are on me; but when he removes them I feel as if released from a spell, and I creep away shrinking, shuddering, and dreading the moment when they will be turned on me again. Oh, you don't know!" she cried helplessly, then began to

smile and grow animated as her eyes encountered and mesmerically followed those of her father.

"Chilson, we were just getting ready to skim through 'The Merry War' when you came in. Is your voice in trim? Marguerite will play for us, and you and Naida and I can draw straws for the rôle of prima donna."

The captain gave a specimen of his voice in his gay, ringing laughter, and there was a general rush for the piano and a pile of music near by. Light opera was Captain Dunbar's preference, and he insisted upon "The Merry War" in spite of suggestions and pleadings for half a dozen other operas. The captain's magnificent form, his military bearing, his bright, restless eyes and broad forehead, away from which his iron-gray hair was brushed in a bold, self-conscious way, rendered him in appearance illy suited to the character of the dainty, effeminate Marquis; but his clear, sweet tenor fitted him to the rôle, and there was no hesitation in assigning to him his part in the impromptu rendition of the sparkling little opera.

They laughed and sang and applauded, and corrected and hissed and encored, according to the degree of success or failure of attempts repeated a dozen times over. Captain Dunbar seized his daughter's handkerchief and, with many a dainty grimace and flourish, took several turns around the room while rendering the waltz-song, and Shreves seized Naida herself and followed in his wake. The captain then picked up the musician and

whirled away after the younger couple. The opera was turned into a dance, and fun ran rampant. Breathless from his double duty as dancer and orchestra, Captain Dunbar sank into a chair and brought the giddy revel to an end. He mopped his forehead with the tiny square of linen and apostrophized it ironically:

"A pretty soldier's handkerchief this! It isn't the kind Marguerite Tiercourt found in her soldier-boy's pocket; is it, my dear?"

"Like my Tam O'Shanter handkerchief?" laughed Mrs. Dunbar. "No indeed!"

"Your what kind of handkerchief?" asked Shreves.

"My Tam O'Shanter handkerchiefs—so dubbed on account of the initials, T.A.M., in the corner. Ah, Jack! what a time you had establishing your identity with that handkerchief and the suit of blue against you. I refused to take charge of him at first, Shreves. I thought he was one of those cold, phlegmatic Yankees, and I wanted to nurse our brave, fiery, rebel boys."

"Were you one of the lovely Florence Nightingales of the late war?" asked he in surprise.

"She was indeed!" said her husband with a proud, fond look. "It was in a hospital that I met and fell in love with her."

"But what about the handkerchief and the blue clothes? I have always understood that you were in the Southern army."

"I was; and I went into a battle, was knocked

over by a shell and, after many hours, taken to a hospital to be doctored and nursed back to life and the identity I had come near losing at the same time. I awoke to consciousness one day to find myself dubbed throughout the ward as 'The T.A.M. Yankee.' I was a source of interest to every one on account of my unexplained presence among them. When I announced that my name was Jack Dunbar, and that I was a rebel with the rest of them, the information was received with incredulity, then with flattering demonstration. I could never account for the handkerchief and the blue clothes save on the supposition that some unfortunate fellow in close quarters thought it wouldn't make any difference to St. Peter what color I wore when I knocked for admission at the gates above, while it would make considerable difference to a sentinel here below what color he wore when he sought an exit."

"Was simply your word taken under those peculiar circumstances?" asked Shreves a little incredulously.

"The South made an earnest call about that time, and I was sent into the field to prove my identity and love for the cause by action. If any one doubted my color in '62 he did not in '65. I fought some hard battles, both as a private and an officer, and I went through the war from beginning to close with but this single wound." He parted his hair and revealed an oval indenture.

Shreves shuddered and turned away. Convinc-

ing and refuting testimony followed so close upon the heels the one of the other that he had lost confidence in his own conclusions. The incident of the handkerchief with the initials, T. A. M. and the blue uniform of a Federal soldier substituted for the gray of a Confederate, had brought up before his eyes a weird, ghastly, but self-explanatory picture.—The moon shone down upon a deserted battle-field strewn with gray. A single patch of blue flecked the scene, and a pale, desperate face looked down upon a cold white one and met a temptation there too strong for resistance. The fallen soldier was robbed of his insignia, and in death wore the colors that in life he hated; and the moon herself, had never so small a cloud passed before her face, could not have guessed beneath which uniform beat the Northern heart and beneath which lay the ashes of extinguished Southern fire. This suggested to Shreves still another explanation of the mysterious link between the two men. The smothered, not extinguished, fire had flamed up and burned brightly till the close of the war; the Northern heart had beat on, in professed unconsciousness, through the same period. Captain Dunbar spoke freely and frequently of his home and friends in the South, of his childhood, boyhood and early manhood. He was generous, fiery and impulsive—a typical Southerner. Thomas A. Mordeck never referred to his life previous to the war; no one knew where it had been passed. Though apparently cold and

phlegmatic in temperament, he impressed one as being an artificial Northerner. There was an evident difference in their ages. Might they not have been born of the same parents, reared in the same home, their joys, sorrows, pleasures and disappointments shared until the war came and divided that family as it had done so many others? Briefly, might not they be estranged brothers unconscious of their present fellow-citizenship? Shorn of his name, self-exiled from his home, haunted by the memory of a dead brother robbed on the field where mayhap his bullet had laid him, branded in his boyhood's home as a traitor without having struck but the one blow for the cause of his adoption—did not these suffice to account for the millionaire's silence in regard to the past, his present bitterness, melancholy, and his reticence with his family? Might not these be some of the bones of the skeleton in the Mordeck closet?

As these thoughts flashed rapidly through Shreves' excited brain, and he saw a possible explanation that entailed neither misery or shame, a devout Thank God! welled up in his heart, but was stifled by the remembrance of two small oval depressions of the skull which were too identical in size, shape and location to be readily accepted as a mere coincidence; yet such a thing was possible, and in the light of other freaks of nature and chance it proved a temporary anchor for his tempest-tossed thoughts.

When Captain Dunbar had parted his hair and revealed the scar, Shreves had turned away shudderingly; but scarcely a moment was expended in establishing the foregoing theory, and he turned back and asked with respectful curiosity:

"May I examine the scar? I did not discover it while painting your portrait."

"I will shave my head some time and let you immortalize in plaster the bumps and depressions of my cranium," observed Captain Dunbar sarcastically.

"A shaved head is not becoming to you, as I can attest from memory," laughed his wife.

"Marguerite, be so good as to explain to Mr. Chilson that I was not a convict. He looks uncertain."

Shreves bit his lips hard to keep back a retort. His prospective father-in-law had been thus far more friendly and civil than he had been since his sudden dislike followed so closely upon the heels of his sudden liking; but this ironic turn presaged an unpleasant mood, and Shreves decided to take leave the first opportunity that offered. In the mean time he drew Naida aside and, after a few pleasantries of interest to no one save themselves, he inquired what her father thought of her début into a new world.

"He was very much pleased, but was provoked with mamma for not returning Mrs. Mordeck's call or chaperoning me. Mamma grew angry—she is very nervous and irritable of late—and said

the fashionable world was no place for a gambler's wife. Papa shook his fist at me, and said it was 'that damned Chilson' who had made us believe—"

"What?"

"Don't be so excitable, Shreves; you know papa is peculiar and imagines a good many very queer things. Mamma defended you and said she had known of our—disgrace, she called it—since I was a tiny child. He denied that he is a gambler; admitted that he played cards now and then, but declared that he spends the rest of his time very differently."

"I think, had I been in your mother's place, I should have asked how he spends it."

"And very probably have received the blow he looked as if he should like to give mamma when she was so foolish as to ask him the same question," shrugged Naida.

Shreves recoiled; it was horrible to him to listen to such unfeeling words from such young lips. What kind of nature was hers to be so insensible to shame; to be so unmoved by scenes that were almost, and might at any time prove to be, tragic in their result? A stray bit of information, gleaned in his study of insanity, recurred to him as he gazed down upon her, fair as a Greek goddess and as little Christianized. Some authority had declared "that he had met with cases in which, as a result of parental insanity, there had been a seemingly complete absence of moral sense and feeling

in the offspring." The words, however, were hardly shaped in his mind ere they were banished by the pertinent suggestion that if they were applicable to any case it would be to that of Browné Mordeck, the daughter, and not to Naida Dunbar, the niece, unless—

Shreves found himself drifting back into the old channel of doubt and suspicion, and promptly pulled himself up. His last theory was plausible and pleasant, all others pointed to shame and misery. Though his present anchor might not be secure, he would not voluntarily haul it in and set himself adrift again.

He said good-night to the radiant, happy wife; offered a hand to the handsome, prodigal husband; whispered a lover's adieu to his *fiancée*, and went home to his lonely quarters to ponder over what the evening had disclosed, and to try to free his mind from the harassing thoughts born of coincidental circumstances and that proverbially dangerous thing, a little knowledge.



CHAPTER XVIII.

SHREVES awoke the next morning with a confused idea of what had taken place the evening before. He felt as if he had been at an uncanny revel, even the remembrance of which seemed unreal. He felt depressed; he could now understand the influence of which Naida complained the night before. He determined to shake it off, to rid himself of the sinister influence of, not only Captain Dunbar, but of his own thoughts and nervous imaginings.

He arose, bathed, dressed, and went out to breakfast. The day was clear, cold and exhilarating. He returned in a healthier frame of mind than had been his state for several weeks. The more he dwelt upon his latest theory, the more plausible it became. Refusing to consider the uncanny coincidence of the identical wounds, he could see nothing improbable in the striking resemblance between two brothers, their espousal of different causes, the consequent estrangement, and the fateful chain that had linked their destinies through years of silence, separation and ignorance. There pervaded him a deep sense of gratitude as he reflected that no one was party to his scientific investigations and learned theorizing.

and he felt that his agency in a reconciliation between the brothers would atone for the domestic chaos into which he had come near plunging two families.

There were a few touches yet to be given to Mr. Mordeck's portrait, and he sat down before his easel and, whistling, went to work. A half-hour, perhaps, had passed when the door opened and Captain Dunbar entered in his breezy, energetic style. Shreves arose hastily and went forward to meet him.

"I haven't paid you a visit for some time," said the captain, as if his visits were anticipated pleasures.

Shreves made some courteous response, but with evident disinclination toward friendliness. The loud, sportive captain jarred harshly upon him here in his studio, where he had been accustomed for several weeks past to the companionship of the grave, refined Mr. Mordeck; and it suddenly occurred to him why he disliked the one man and liked the other despite an equally strong effort to conquer both feelings. Captain Dunbar assaulted one with a physical magnetism, Naida with a physical perfection; while Mr. Mordeck and his daughter drew one out from the coldest and most prejudiced retreat by a simple mental and moral force. He was hardly conscious of the superiority thus given Miss Mordeck over his betrothed, for his comparison had been between the two men, reacting upon the child of each through the

daughter's mental and physical likeness to her father; but he was keenly aware of wishing that Mr. Mordeck had been Naida's father, without pausing to reject what, considering the duplicate work of nature, the result would have been.

With Shreves' betrothed as one premise and his wish as a second, a person syllogistically inclined might have drawn the conclusion that he wished he were betrothed to Miss Mordeck—which, as a simple fact, was the case, but as a sentiment had never been dreamed of. The fact so patent to Mrs. Dunbar: namely, that in Browné Mordeck Shreves could find all that he loved in Naida and all that he craved besides, did not occur to him as a practicable longing, any more than that an American could, by a simple wish, add to the natural beauty of the Hudson the ancient grandeur of the Rhine. The two were distinct, non-combinable works of nature; and the American must be content with his Hudson and the German with his Rhine, for neither could possess both.

This was the reasoning of sentiment and modesty; fact and egotism would have chosen a different simile.

Captain Dunbar's roving black eyes caught sight of the portrait on the easel. He whistled softly, then laughed aloud.

"Is that your humble servant regenerated?" he asked sarcastically.

Shreves replied shortly: "No; it is the father of Naida's double."

"Is that so?" He examined the picture more closely and in silence. "We would be more alike if he were not so damned saintly looking," he observed, then broke into boisterous laughter. "What will you bet, Chilson, that I can't make myself up so that your sanctimonious friend would not know me from his own reflection in a mirror?—how is that?" He shook his iron-gray hair down over his forehead and threw into his face a melancholic gravity.

Shreves started back in amazement at the transformation. "Why, sir," he exclaimed excitedly, "if your dress were different I myself could not tell you from Mr. Mordeck."

"How does the saintly gentleman robe himself?" inquired the captain in the mocking tone habitually adopted with his son-in-law-elect.

"He wears loose-fitting clothes of black, with a small tie and plain linen."

An odd, puzzled look crossed the captain's face during Shreves' brief description, and he opened his mouth once or twice as if to interrupt, but hesitated as though uncertain whether or not to put his thoughts into words.

"That's queer! damned queer!" he blurted out at last. "I have clothes like those in my trunk at the Exeter, and I wear them when I—when I leave home. This is the key I had made to keep prying servants out; it is the only key that will unlock that trunk, and that trunk is the only thing this key will unlo—"

He threw up his hands suddenly, looked about him in a dazed manner, and dropped to the floor.

His fall was not that of the inert body of a swooning man, but of a person suddenly overcome by sleep, his knees giving away first and his body gradually assuming a recumbent position.

Shreves bent over him in consternation, sought his heart and found it beating a little slowly and feebly but not abnormally so, noted the deep, regular respiration, and arose from his knees reassured but hopelessly puzzled. He shook the sleeper, called to him, sprinkled water in his face, and tried every natural means of awaking him, but nothing seemed to penetrate his deep insensibility. The only explanation that suggested itself to Shreves was that the captain had taken an overdose of some opiate, and, acting upon this supposition, he dragged the prostrate body to a couch and succeeded in lifting it thereon. He was starting for a doctor, when the captain opened his eyes and said in a slow, modulated voice, very unlike his usual loud and quick tones:

"You have kept your promise, my young friend."

"What promise?" asked Shreves, his heart almost-standing still from the quick suspicion that flashed through his brain; but Morpheus had again locked his victim in that strange deep sleep, and he was left a helpless witness, not knowing what course to pursue. He was starting a second time

for a physician, when the sleeper again opened his eyes and sat up and looked about him.

"Are you better, Ca—, sir?" inquired Shreves with subdued excitement. He felt as if he were standing on the brink of something unknown, which might prove to be a precipice or merely the gentle slope of a rolling plain.

"I am all right now. Where did you run across me? I tried to come to you as soon as I felt the first warning, but I yielded to the accursed thirst before I could get here, and after that I knew no more. What day is this?"

"Wednesday."

"Wednesday!—the 17th or the 24th?"

"The 17th."

"I have been gone only twenty-four hours then. Was I not here in your studio yesterday morning?" He seemed to want merely a confirmation of his words, then continued musingly: "I never returned as soon as that but once before, and it was followed by what Garrard politely termed delirium. I don't feel as I did that time, however." He laid his hand on his watch-chain with a sudden, nervous movement, and satisfying himself that the peculiar key he always wore attached to it was in its place, he said nothing but looked relieved. His eyes wandered on down and took on a disgusted expression as he noted the stylish and pronounced cut of his trousers.

"Where did I get these dudish clothes?"

"I think they are an instinctive masquerade, and

that the key you have there would reveal where they came from," said Shreves boldly. There was no longer any hesitancy or uncertainty in his mind or attitude. He had seen Captain Dunbar change into Thomas Mordeck under his own eyes, and with the numerous similar instances, bearing the stamp of expert testimony, fresh in his memory, he very readily and plausibly diagnosed this as a case of masked epilepsy.

There was no time for brooding sympathy for the unconscious victims. Providence had placed the discovery in his hands, and, though he was appalled at the responsibility it entailed, he accepted the sacred trust and uttered a swift, silent prayer for direction.

Mr. Mordeck occupied the short silence following Shreves' significant statement, with searching the pockets of the coat, vest and trousers that were new and strange to him; but he could find nothing that served as a clew to where or how he had spent his time—no letters, no papers, no marked linen. His pockets were as non-committal as discretion had always kept those of his ordinary dress.

"You say you think this key unlocks a trunk or something that holds my masquerading outfit for these sprees?"

"Why do you persist in calling them sprees?" said Shreves impatiently.

"Why? Because I know no other name for them. 'Tis true it is a feeble term for a beastly

drunkenness that renders a man unconscious of his actions, but it is the only one I know."

Shreves decided that it would be as well to let him keep this explanation of his periodical disappearances for a while at least. He himself did not care to assume the responsibility of revealing the true nature of them without first having consulted a physician; and not knowing just how far he could trust to Mr. Mordeck's present unconsciousness of what had taken place in another state of consciousness, he was as cautious as possible in seeking information he felt was necessary toward clearing up the mystery of this double life.

"Mr. Mordeck, could you trust me with that key for a few hours?"

The millionaire shook his head and smiled gravely: "I could trust you with my life, my young friend, but not with this key. I was never without it but once, and I would rather die than go through what I did then."

"You know what it unlocks?" Shreves exclaimed in surprise.

"No; I haven't the faintest idea—unless it is a trunk, as you suggested—but I know that upon one occasion, after having yielded to the demon that rules me, the discovery of its absence shocked me into temporary soberness; and I returned home to receive the joyful, surprised welcome of my wife and children, and then to finish my orgies in the home never before desecrated. My God! the memory of that night's disgrace has almost

driven me to suicide.—Delirium, Garrard called it; delirium tremens, Ethel knew it to be; but not a hint of her discovery has ever crossed her lips. I still have my children's love and respect, and my Ethel still worships her idol of recognized clay; but I would give ten years of my life, dear as it is to me surrounded by the most precious gifts to man, had this key not gone out of my possession for a moment and I been able to spare Ethel the burden of shame and misery she will not share even with me. It is not from lack of confidence in you, Shreves, that I refuse your request; I dare not give up the key."

"Would you object, then, to going with me to the Exeter?"

"Certainly not; where is it?"

His tone and manner convinced Shreves that he had no recollection of the place, and he therefore felt the safer in carrying out a plan suddenly conceived.

"Do you not remember the building? It is one of the oldest on this side."

"I am not very familiar with the north side. Up to my first visit to you I had not been over here twice since the war. I will go with you any time you wish, however."

"Now?"

"Now as well as any time. But what about these clothes? If I were to meet a friend—"

"We will go in a carriage; beside, there is nothing the matter with the clothes except their ultra-

fashionableness, and you are not the only man in whom I have known fine wines to beget a taste for fine feathers."

"Chilson, is it your knowledge of my weakness that makes joking easy upon such a grave subject and with a man so much older than yourself?"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Mordeck, if I offend—"

"You do not offend; I was merely seeking the cause of a strange but pleasant effect. I think I am fonder of you than of any one I have ever known outside of my family, and I want your liking and respect, but I have pursued an odd course to obtain it. The social and business world would not stand so in awe of the stern millionaire if they knew the half you know."

"I appreciate your friendship and confidence, Mr. Mordeck, and I trust you may never have cause to regret having shifted a part of your burden to younger shoulders."

"There, Shreves, you have struck the keynote of the great change that has come over me. I bore my burden so long in silence and darkness that it assumed a spectral magnitude; but by the light of your youth and happiness I see a chance of flinging it down and trampling it under foot, and if you will stand by me until the enemy is conquered, I will try to be all to you that your father might be if he knew how to appreciate the blessing Heaven has bestowed upon him in the gift of such a son."

Shreves remained silent; he did not know what

to say. The future looked so dark to him he dared not try to penetrate it. Had it not been for Mrs. Dunbar, whom he loved and admired sincerely, he would not have hesitated a moment in the plain path of duty. Indeed, he could have pushed on toward the goal eagerly and with a light heart. Naida, he knew, could be easily consoled for the loss of the father she feared more than loved, and he could give her a name ere he robbed her of the one that had never really been hers. The shame would rankle only in his own mind, not in hers,—again some words, readier in application, sprang up from a corner of memory and passed in mental review: “As a result of parental insanity, there is sometimes a seemingly complete absence of moral sense and feeling in the offspring,”—but he felt that great as would be the sacrifice he could willingly incur it, to be the means of restoring a man to home, happiness and honor; and had Naida been the only one to be considered, much of the darkness shrouding the future would have been light as noonday.

It did not occur to him to ask himself what were the Mordecks to him that he should be willing to take a nameless bride with beauty and the curse of insanity as her only heritage, in order to bury the skeleton in their closet and add this crowning happiness to lives otherwise replete with the gifts of God and man.

“Chilson, is your silence in regard to what has taken place in the past twenty-four hours inten-

tional, or is there nothing to tell?" asked Mr. Mordeck as they drove toward the Exeter.

Shreves hesitated a moment. "Mr. Mordeck, if I leave your question unanswered for a few days, will you continue to trust me and believe that I do so for a good purpose?"

"I have placed myself in your hands. If you succeed in restoring to me my self-respect, however severe the means, I shall owe to you the greatest debt man can owe to man."

When they reached the Exeter, Shreves preceded Mr. Mordeck into the building. A Hibernian janitor met them at the door.

"The top of the morning to ye, Captain!" he said familiarly. Shreves responded to the salutation as if it had been addressed to him, adding in a lower tone: "Show us to Captain Dunbar's room."

"The wan occupied by his thrunk, you main?" queried Pat with grinning significance.

"Yes; and here is something to keep a silent tongue in your head."

"Lord save yer honor! I niver pokes me fainger in datictive's poie."

Shreves mused over this reply while the janitor ran his silver-lined hand down into his trousers' pocket and brought out a large bunch of keys. Nothing more was said until they reached the door at the extreme end of the hall on the third floor.

"Here is the kay, yer honor. The captain is

not particular about what part o' the house his room is in so his thrunk is in his room; and we move him about sometimes for the convainance of less gintleman-like boarders," said Patrick.

They opened the door, entered, and locked it after them. If Pat loitered outside, his patience must have become exhausted, for no word was spoken for a full minute. The apartment was such as might belong to a transient guest, with nothing to identify it with Captain Dunbar's occupancy save the trunk referred to by Pat. There was nothing in the room to attract special attention; but Shreves' eyes had been riveted from the moment of entrance upon a medium-size leather trunk. He crossed the room with accelerated pulse and quickening heartbeats, and stooped to examine the lock. Captain Dunbar's last statement, never finished, had proven correct so far—he had a room in the Exeter, and in that room was a trunk to which there was a peculiar key; and now it only remained to be seen whether or not there was in that trunk the suit of clothes he said would be found there.

"Will you unlock this trunk for me, Mr. Mordeck?"

"I!" he exclaimed, blanching a deadly white. He had not before suspected Shreves' motive in bringing him here; but now it occurred to him that these frequent intervals of unconsciousness during the past twenty-five years might not have been spent in drunken stupidity, but in irrational

activity. He shuddered, then without a word stooped and unlocked the trunk. He turned away as if he dared not just yet face the revelation that might be in store for him, and Shreves seized the opportunity to open the trunk noiselessly and glance through the contents before they met the eyes of the owner. A hurried upheaval of the contents sufficed to satisfy him that Mr. Mordeck would learn nothing definite from them, while they might reveal much to himself.

"Those are the clothes I wore to your studio yesterday morning," said Mr. Mordeck in a tone that startled Shreves. "No—don't stop; let's go to the bottom of it; the trunk is mine, I presume.—Here is another suit of mine. I lost this two years ago. I waked up one morning at the Russel House, in Detroit, and found some clothes very much like these I have on lying on a chair and my own clothes gone. I should have thought I had been robbed had not a similar thing occurred once before in another city where I had wandered while drinking. And the fact of my watch being safe in both instances was a proof that the changes had not been made by a burglar. I wonder if the vest with the five one-hundred-dollar bills concealed in the lining is to be found here also. I was handling some money several years ago when suddenly that cursed, irresistible thirst seized me. I resisted it long enough to tear a place in my vest and conceal the money, then all was a blank for ten days."

Shreves began to spread out the contents faster. "Have you lost many such large sums of money?" he asked as he laid out a handsome suit he remembered having seen Captain Dunbar wear a few months before.

"My sprees have averaged me a thousand dollars a year."

"Is that—so?" He was about to say "is that all?" remembering how Mrs. Dunbar and Naida lived and dressed, but he recollected Captain Dunbar's phenomenal success at cards, and was able to throw all the surprise in his tone into the substituted word.

"I lost five thousand dollars at one time—" began Mr. Mordeck, when Shreves uttered an exclamation and held up the vest of a third black suit found at the bottom of the trunk.

"Is this the vest?"

"I think it is; look for the rent in the lining."

The opening was readily found, and Shreves thrust his fingers into it. He could feel nothing. He wrenched the lining loose, and there lay the flatly folded bills. He took them out and smoothed them, one by one, across his knee, then handed them to Mr. Mordeck.

"Keep them," said he, turning away: "Heaven knows how grateful I should be if I knew the rest of the twenty-five thousand had been bestowed so worthily!—Oh God! how am I to go back to Ethel with these unaccounted-for moments in my life!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE most irksome burden to be borne is an untransferable one, and Shreves began to writhe beneath the weight of his unshared secret. After witnessing the effect upon Mr. Mordeck of the partial discovery of the mystery shrouding his life, he dared not account to him for those "unaccounted-for moments"; yet, on the other hand, he hesitated to put the facts before a physician ere he had consulted some member of the unfortunate man's family—which family and which member of which family?

To discriminate between Mrs. Mordeck and Mrs. Dunbar in choosing a confidant would be assuming a knowledge he did not possess save through conviction, and what was conclusive evidence to him might not be regarded as pathognomonic data in an expert, diagnostic decision as to which was the sane and which the insane state in this case of double consciousness. Over and above the fear of doing an injustice to the legal wife was the certainty that neither of the women, so sinisterly linked by fate, was strong enough mentally, morally or physically to withstand the shock of the revelation and render him the aid necessary.

He shrank unnaturally from taking his betrothed into his confidence, and tried to persuade himself

it was from a desire to shield her as long as possible from the sorrow, shame and uncertainty that would be disquieting elements of which her nature stood in morbid dread; but he could not blind himself to the fact that it was, rather, because of her inability to appreciate her own and her mother's position whether her father's ancestral name proved to be Dunbar or Mordeck.

Tom Mordeck, Jr., was too young and impulsive to be intrusted with so resultful a secret, consequently Shreves found himself precisely where he knew he would come out, whether by a circuitous or a direct path, and without further ado he began planning the best method of breaking the news to Miss Mordeck.

He recalled all the gently diplomatic means he had ever known to be used, in theory, to weaken a shock, but in due order banished them beyond the pale of consideration, and in a fit of stern unsentimentality donned his topcoat and cap and went straight to the Michigan Avenue residence, rang the bell and asked for Miss Mordeck.

If he had counted upon being kept waiting as an interval to be utilized in improvising preliminaries to the main object of his call, he had reckoned amiss; for Miss Mordeck came down almost immediately.

"Have you come to renew our interrupted discussion upon insanity?" she inquired, extending her hand and smiling brightly.

Shreves forgot for the moment that she did not know all he knew, and her light tone shocked him.

"The irregular hour I have chosen for my call would indicate that I have something important to say to you," said he gravely.

Her heart stood still for a moment, then beat fiercely and bitterly. Oh, irony of fate! to put words so fraught with meaning into the mouth of one meaning so little by them!

"Has your study of insanity revealed a number of your intimate friends to be undeclared madmen?" said she with a short, cynical laugh.

"A comprehensive study of insanity certainly does incline us to believe that a very small percentage of the world's lunatics are behind asylum bars; but my study has been devoted to one special phase of insanity."

"Epilepsie larvée?" she inquired with mock professional technicality.

"Why did you select that?" demanded he, startled and without an answering smile.

"Why? Oh—because it is the most mysterious and romantic and attractive phase of insanity that investigation has revealed to me. You remember when I thought you were an ordinary epileptic I shrank from you with unutterable horror."

"I don't know anything of the kind, if you will pardon the contradiction."

"True. I passed through that state of repulsion in my room, and when I next saw you I had decided you to be a victim of the more fascinating and mysterious phase of the malady."

"How long did you rest under this mistake?" asked Shreves with an eagerness Browné did not understand. She colored and answered with an evasive shrug:

"Long enough to exhaust all the available authority upon the subject."

"Then you are familiar with the remarkable and almost incredible acts of victims of this form of insanity?"

"I do not think a story could be too romantic and sensational to obtain my credence if I were assured that the hero of it were a victim of masked epilepsy."

"Not if I were to assure you that the following case is authentic," he urged, taking a notebook from his inner pocket and reading in a slow, argumentative tone: "'A manufacturer left his office at about 9 A.M., saying that he was going to a florist's to purchase some bulbs. He remained absent eight days. He was tracked all over the city. . . . It was ascertained that he had been to theaters; to hotels, where he slept; to shops, where he had made purchases; and that he had taken a journey of a hundred miles from New York. . . . He had then returned to New York, passed the night at a hotel, and on the eighth day made his appearance at the office. He had no recollection of any one event which had taken place after leaving his office eight days previously, till he awoke on the morning after his return to the city, and found himself at a hotel at which he was a stranger. It

was ascertained beyond question that in all this time his actions had been entirely correct, to all appearances; that his speech was coherent, and that he had acted in all respects as any man in the full possession of his faculties would have acted.' Does not your credulity rebel just a little at such a story as this?" Shreves insisted, fearful lest the, to him, too glaring analogy between the quoted case and that of Miss Mordeck's father might strike in upon her comprehension before she was prepared for the shock.

"Not the slightest," said she with a negative and unimpressed shake of the head, "for the good reason that I have recently heard of a case even more remarkable. My authority is not so distinguished as yours, but is equally reliable. A young man of more than ordinary intelligence, moving in the best circle of his native town, left the ball-room very abruptly one night after having paid marked attention to one young lady almost throughout the evening. Just two months later, at about the same hour of the night, he found himself in another ball-room in a city he knew to be nearly a thousand miles from his home, talking to a young lady to whom he had no recollection of having been introduced, but whose words, tone and manner toward him indicated something more than mere friendly acquaintance. She called him by a name unfamiliar to him, spoke of places, scenes and occasions not impressed upon his memory; and when suspicion made him formal

and curiosity inquisitive, she grew angry and reproached him. The result was a quarrel. She accused him of having taken too much wine; and he, unable to account for his presence there and his acquaintance with herself, acquiesced in the charge by his silence. She upbraided, deplored and wept by turns, until, half mad from doubt, fear and confusion, he rushed out into the street and, bareheaded and in evening dress, pursued his furious promenade until brought abruptly to a standstill by a uniformed officer whose insignia were unmistakable. Curled darling of fashion that he was, he slept in the station-house that night, and was rescued from disgrace and despair by two brothers who had come in search of him. They had tracked him to St. Louis, thence to Louisville, thence to Nashville, and finally to the city in which he was carrying things with the deft hand of a young Cræsus. A forged bit of paper here and there left behind him visible and self-explanatory tracks of his brilliant tour. The medical and legal fraternities are now at war over him, with the almost certain probability that the doctors will triumph and secure for his future abode an insane asylum instead of the penitentiary. What is your opinion on taxed credulity?"

Shreves made no reply. His nerves were at a tension not easily relaxed. He had been hovering near the brink of a revelation between which and herself he had stood as a safeguard, when suddenly she had slipped past him and skimmed

the very edge of the fatal discovery without suspecting the abyss beneath. If the instance she herself had just related contained for her no suggestiveness, he could not hope by indirect means to prepare her mind for an unaided solution of the mystery shrouding her father's life. He felt as if he should have to stretch out his hand and push her into the chasm she would not see.

"Mr. Chilson, you are not like yourself; what has happened? Have you come to tell us something about papa—no, no! that can't be; papa is at home, he is well and happy and—and mamma is happy too, because papa does not stay away so long as he used; and they both are at this moment in that room over there, just across the hall—I could make them hear me by raising my voice never so little—I know they are there and no harm could have befallen—Mr. Chilson, what is it?" Browné's voice was half pleading, half imperative, and she had arisen and stood before him for a moment, then sunk back on the sofa to elude his effort to catch her hands.

He resumed his seat beside her and took her hands by force. She wrenched them away from him and pressed them tightly over her mouth, while her eyes pleaded to be put out of suspense and the tightening of the guard over her lips promised that no sound should escape them to attract the undesired presence of those she felt intuitively she was destined to shield.

"Would to Heaven another tongue had been chosen to reveal the terrible truth!" exclaimed Shreves in answer to her mute entreaty. "Miss Mordeck, you must be strong, you must not fail me; I depend upon you as I have never had to depend upon mortal before. I have tried to awaken your suspicions, to prepare your mind for a ready comprehension of a fact that has been in turn with me a doubt, a fear, and at last a hopeless certainty; but you refuse to see my meaning,—you—Miss Mordeck, in your study of insanity, this particular phase of insanity we have been discussing, have you never thought of a key to the solution of the mysterious absences of your father?" He stopped abruptly, thoroughly alarmed at the effect the revelation had upon her.

She had removed her hands from over her mouth and folded them in her lap, while she looked him straight in the face and laughed softly. There was not much mirth in her laugh, neither was it wholly hysterical; it came of a reaction from despairing anticipation to bearable reality.

"Oh, Mr. Chilson, mamma will be so happy! Affliction is so much easier to bear than disgrace! She thinks—I have only of late discovered it, but she has believed it all these years—that poor, innocent, unconscious papa is a drunkard; that these absences are humiliating, disgraceful carousals, or stupid debauches. Think what a joyful revelation the truth will be to her,—and to papa, too, if his case is such as those we both have read

of. He will now let Dr. Garrard follow him and stay with him and treat him for this strange, terrible disease; and mamma and Tom and I need never again be silent and ashamed of the mysterious absences which puzzled dear papa as much as they did us. Oh! a recognized trouble is so much less repulsive than a suspicion-distorted one. We can love and honor and pity dear papa, and make his life happy with the assurance of being watched over and cared for by those he loves and who love him, when deprived by an unreadable providence of the consciousness that makes him responsible to God and man. It is a terrible, terrible affliction, Mr. Chilson, but it is not disgrace!"

Shreves turned away; he could not bear to look upon her eager, joyous face; he felt as if he had administered an exhilarating anodyne before plunging the fatal knife into his victim. How could he tell her the rest of the story, the unorganizable chaos into which seven lives had been plunged! Would she understand what a double life in act as well as in consciousness implied, or should he have to explain to her the disgrace—perhaps ignominy—that might be her portion and that of those she loved? He shrank with greater dread and regret from finishing his cruel task than he had done from beginning it; but he had told too much not to tell more, and with what courage he could he faced the inevitable.

His continued gravity struck a chill to her heart, and she went and stood by his side and waited

with quiet dread, rather than patience, for him to tell her all he had come to tell.

"There is something else," said she, turning her head so as to look up into his face encouragingly. There was a pathos in the situation that touched Shreves deeply and increased his confidence and respect, while his heart began to ache for her as it had not done for any of the other victims of the impending sorrow and disgrace. He laid his hand on her shoulder—whether to steady her against the coming shock or as an instinctive symbol of the burden he was soon to lay there, he could not have told had it occurred to him to question his motive for the action—and tenderest pity rendered his voice as unflinching as heartlessness could have done.

"Browne Mordeck, I would have spared you if I could; but your youth, strength of character, and filial love assure me of the only aid I can rely on in the discharge of a sacred duty imposed upon me by a mysterious providence. It is not too much to say that more than life or death depends upon your firmness and self-control. An exclamation might bring your father and mother into the room, and you are not yet prepared to meet them. Your father is still in ignorance as to the nature of his affliction, and a sudden revelation might dethrone his reason forever. Do you realize all that depends upon your self-control?"

"Yes," said she in a low voice, but with no hint of weakness.

His hand still rested on her shoulder, and they made no motion toward resuming their seats.

"What I am about to tell you is the result of neither imagination, suspicion, nor sophistical reasoning from a superficial knowledge. I was an eye-witness to the transformation of your father from one state of double consciousness into the other, and I have known him personally in both phases of his double life. In judging your father remember that an expert upon insanity says 'that in epileptic mania there is in one sense a loss of consciousness, but in another sense the consciousness remains. That there is a loss of the knowledge of the relation of the individual to the world and of his own identity, but he is conscious at the time of all that occurs during his paroxysms, although when this is over he has no recollection of his former state of consciousness; that there are . . . two states of consciousness, in neither of which has he any recollection of the other.' Consider this and remember that he says still further in connection with a number of cases reported, 'that in these [~~cases of prolonged~~ double consciousness] the individual led separate and distinct lives, knew different people, had different habits, and were possessed of different mental characteristics in each state; that in each of the periods the individual was conscious, but he had no recollection in one state of consciousness of any circumstances that took place in the other.' "

"Yes, yes! I know all that," exclaimed she. "I am as familiar with the subject as you are. I do not have to be convinced of the possibility of papa's having led a double life, I only want to know something of that other life. Was he a gambler, a forger, a drunkard, an outlaw, a convict? Did he carry on some disgraceful, illegal business? Tell me, tell me, do not be afraid! I can bear it. It is not shame, not disgrace; he was not responsible for his actions—oh, poor, poor papa, the world cannot be so cruel as to reproach you for such an affliction!"

She was terribly excited, and suspense was playing upon her nerves in a way to alarm Shreves. He determined to tell her the cruel truth without further preparation. Perhaps the shock might quiet her.

"You and your beautiful counterpart, Naida Dunbar, are the proofs of your father's double life."

Several seconds elapsed before any sound escaped her lips. All danger of crying out was past, and Shreves knew it to be so as he watched the silent struggle for self-mastery. She had received the blow and felt its shock to the center and through every fiber of her being; but she was not crushed. Shreves found himself, as was his wont, growing curious to know the thoughts hurrying through her brain; and, in this particular instance, not without cause, for of all the emotions that might have been awakened by such a revelation



there was to be seen in her face only a look of infinite reproach. He was less surprised than pained to hear her exclaim in a voice distinct but hardly above a whisper:

"Oh, Shreves Chilson, you have brought nothing but misery, misery, misery into my life!"

Why should a small voice in his own heart echo the words? How had she brought misery into his life? Was it her fault that he of late discovered so many defects in Naida's character? Had the study of insanity been the more fascinating because of her interest in it? Was she to blame for his failing devotion to art, for his disloyal feelings toward his model, his idol, for his dissatisfaction with his past life, his future prospects, his present existence? Oh, perfection of irony if in the moment of man's triumph over the artist he should learn that it was not an unconscious light that had been thrown into his life, that Browné's words meant more than the misery of the knowledge just come to her, that in her pain the accusation so long stifled by pride had rushed to her lips—Thou Merciful Spirit, spare him, spare him such a temptation!

The width of the room separated them; how it came to be so neither of them could have recalled. Shreves sank into a chair and buried his face in his hands. Browné was drawn toward him by a power she could not resist. She came and stood beside him, waiting breathlessly for him to lift his

head. He did so at last, and she started back appalled at the misery she saw in it.

"Do you utterly scorn me?" said he with a bitter laugh.

"I scorn you!" she repeated amazedly. "What have you done to deserve my scorn?"

"What I have boasted in my heart of being too honorable, too manly, too noble to do! Oh, shame that I should have proven weakest in the hour I should have been strongest!—Not understand yet? Poor silly bird! set for by a snarer not worthy to plume himself with the least of your bright feathers!—Do you not know that I love you, that your gold, your name, your position have lured me from the beautiful, empty idol my heart bowed down before, and drawn me, as the world predicted, as a mother's suspicion foretold, to the feet of her who combines with the face I worship all that the ambitious, mercenary heart can desire?"

"Hush, hush! in pity's name hush! You wrong yourself, you insult me. You do not love my gold, my name, my position. Stood I shorn of all these—as God knows I may be ere many da—"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that we have taken it for granted that I am the cherished child of fate. Who can say—not you, not I—who has the better right to a father's name? Oh mamma, poor, poor mamma, this will kill you!"

Shreves' face was transfigured. His arm clasped a familiar, yet a strange and bewildering form, and his lips rested in ecstasy upon the head that was bowed in sobs upon his breast. It lasted a moment—this unspeakable joy—then she raised her head, read all his face revealed, and struggled to free herself.

"Shreves, Shreves, you are mad! I have bewitched you, you know not what you do! Think of Naida!"

"I can think of nothing but you, my Browné; I am indeed mad, bewitched, dazzled by a selfish ray of hope that blinds me to all save the happiness I dared not open my heart to. Ah, Browné; Browné! I only rob you of one name to give you another."

Browné ceased struggling; for a moment she, too, was blindly, forgetfully happy. Both found the solution of the puzzling problem of the weeks now gone by. It was not wealth, name, position; Shreves could look forward to those being transferred to the forsaken one without a pang of envy; it was not a beautiful face and form, for those were identical in the old and the new love.

"It is you, you that I love, my darling—your heart, your soul, your mind. Were disease or accident to rob you of your beauty I should but love you the more tenderly; nameless, homeless I can take you into my heart and give you both. Ah, my Browné! our happiness is not in the hands of mortal!"

"Happiness, happiness!" she cried, wrenching herself from him. "How dare I think of happiness? Oh father, mother, Tom! forgive me that I could for a moment dream of happiness at such a cost.—No, no! not another word—not another step nearer me! I am a traitor to you all; I never for a moment cherished the doubt that made the avowal of your love excusable; I knew I was robbing Naida of the love I had always coveted, robbing her in the moment that it was her all. Go, give her a name and a home; it is she you have robbed of those. Clouded, besmirched, dragged in the mire my name may be ere justice hands it back to me; but it is mine, and no power can wrench it from me!" She stopped exhausted; she had never once raised her voice above an ordinary tone, and the concentrated vehemence was the more wearing because of the repression.

The momentary radiance died out of Shreves' face. He, too, felt as if he had buoyed himself upon a groundless hope. Every circumstance, every characteristic, every fact affirmed by an impartial science pointed to Naida as the offspring of the insane parent. But he did not regret his short-lived delusion; it had given him a glimpse of perfect happiness, it had revealed to him the cause of his discontent, freed him from the vague, intangible, life-marring influence of that disquieting element; and he felt strengthened to take up the burden that had for weeks been metamorphosing from love into duty. There were no cross-roads

at this stage of his life; only one broad avenue, to hesitate over which would have been weakness. He knew he was destined to pursue it to the very end; there was no turning back, no branching off. Happiness might have come to him through one by-path; but it was a tortuous path of sorrow, shame and humiliation which he was not selfish enough, now that the first ecstasy was past, to have Browné traverse. Honor, manhood, every instinct of Christianity proclaimed the simple justice of giving his name to her whom he should rob of a father's; and to look at Browné, as he had been looking at her for the past five minutes, and dwell upon her mental, moral and physical strength and beauty, rendered it almost an absurdity to dream of a taint in her blood, almost a sacrilege to rob her even in thought of her birth-right. She raised her eyes and met his fixed regard. She colored, arose and extended her hand.

"Had you not better go now? Your long call might awaken suspicion."

He took her hand, but shook his head and smiled gravely. "I cannot go just yet; we must decide upon some course to pursue. I have not made you suffer merely to have you share the burden of my secret; I need your advice, your counsel, your aid. Besides, I have been here only one short, eventful half-hour."

"Half an hour? It has been to me half a life!"



"It has been all of life to me!—But I was measuring time by the standard according to which we shall be criticised. I would spare you, dear Browné, if I could; but we have no time to lose, we must decide what to do, and do it at once. May I stay?"

CHAPTER XX.

THEY resumed their seats, Shreves on the end of a sofa and Browné in a large armchair close by. She listened in almost absolute silence to his recital of circumstances leading up to his discovery. His curiosity to know her grounds for mistaking him for a lunatic, his eager pursuit of the study thus begun, his interest and regard for Mr. Mordeck, his constant thought of the family across whose path fate had thrown him—all these given utterance for the first time revealed a truth obvious to both of them, and, for Shreves, threw light upon many a puzzling moment of the past month. He smiled, very sadly, it is true, more than once when he recalled his utter unconsciousness, until within a short half-hour, of the state of his mind and heart toward his *fiancée's* more favored double. His love, a man's love, not an artist's admiration, an artist's worship, was an emotion so new and strange that he could not banish all memory of it even amidst the grief, perplexity and dread awakened into keener sensibility by the effect his explanation, his arguments, his proofs were having upon her he loved and whose heart he was piercing with every word he uttered. His eyes and voice revealed much

that would have brought gladness to Browné's heart a short time before; but his love was to her as a gift of flowers to the dead, she could have appreciated it in anticipation, but when it came she was insensible to its motive or result. She was unconscious of all ~~save~~ the misery and disgrace in store for those she loved. She listened to all he had to tell her, and he told her everything, from his first suspicion to the confirmation of his worst fears—listened in silence and despairing acceptance. When he had finished she clasped her hands a little tighter and raised her eyes.

"Poor father, poor mother, poor Mrs. Dunbar—poor all of us!" she murmured with heartrending pathos, then bowed her head on the arm of her chair and sobbed as if her heart would break.

Shreves did not move. His face was stern and his manner calm; but only a lover can know how hard it was for him to see that dear head resting on the insentient chair-arm.

Her tears did not disappoint him; he had not expect stoicism, indeed, did not wish it; and he knew she would be the readier to aid him after this womanly outburst. She cried on unrestrainedly for a few minutes, then dried her tears and turned to him.

"Mr. Chilson, I can find room in my heart for but one wish, and it is such a wicked, oh! such a wicked wish! But think of the publicity, the disgrace, the misery—oh! why publish our shame to the world?"

She scanned his face eagerly for the scorn, the incredulity she expected to see there; but found instead only infinite tenderness and pity.

"I have thought of all that, Browné"; he could not call her Miss Mordeck after the scene of a half-hour before; "my heart and conscience have been waging bitter war since my first suspicion, and I do not mind acknowledging that conscience would have had to yield had there not been a yet stronger force behind it. Think of your father's present condition and think what it might have been had he received medical attention twenty years ago; and, forgive the cruelty of the suggestion, go still further and think what will soon be his condition if he does not receive treatment at once. His attacks are growing more frequent, more uncertain, and more betraying in their effects, in times and places of occurrence. He lives in constant dread of this unrecognized enemy, and is becoming melancholy to the verge of suicide. Do you know, my heart ached for him as it never did for mortal man before when I heard him cry, 'My God! how can I go back to Ethel with these unaccounted-for moments in my life!' He knows too much to be satisfied to remain in ignorance longer; and the question is not, Shall we tell him? but, How shall we best break it to him? It is in this that I want your advice and coöperation. Is your confidence in Dr. Garrard, both as a friend and a physician, such as to make you willing to intrust—"

"Oh yes! dear, dear Dr. Garrard! Let us tell him everything. Why did I not think of him before! Let us send for him at once—ah, no!" she stopped and sighed. "I fear I am not proving the help to you that you hoped for. Be patient with me a little while and I shall understand presently what it is you expect me to do, what it is I ought to do myself."

"You have already helped me; you have shared the burden of responsibility and given me permission to consult Dr. Garrard. Now, if you will promise to try to rally from this shock and be your natural self so far as possible during the trying days before us, you will in no wise fall short of the noble standard by which I have judged you."

She assured him that she would not only try to hide, but would hide, her secret from those who might be fatally injured by a premature discovery of it; and he knew by the resolution in her face, her voice, her manner, that she was not overestimating her strength.

If in the moment of parting their minds reverted to a special revelation of this meeting, and the quick heart-throbs and changing color betrayed the mutual fact, the disloyalty to Naida was surely condonable.

"Shreves, do not think I shall ever believe you were mercenary. The bestowal of our hearts is not always with us, but the keeping of our promises is."

She used his christian name unconsciously, and

was equally oblivious to his start of surprise and joy. He scanned her face closely, and knew that she had used it many times in her heart, to have effected this unwitting familiarity.

The longer he stayed the harder he found it to leave; and, fearing to trust himself with Browné in her tender, retrospective mood, he said good-by, told her that he was going directly to Dr. Garrard's office, and would let her know the result of the interview as soon as possible.

He found Dr. Garrard in, and sat down in the ante-chamber to await his turn. The interval he utilized in pruning his story of all excrescences of sentiment and romance, to have it ready to lay before the man of science and of the world in the form of bare facts. When he was ushered into the interior room and had advanced several steps toward the distinguished occupant, he made a discovery as unexpected as it was easy to explain. There was no mistaking the look of unfriendliness in the doctor's aristocratic face, in the attitude of his fashionably clad figure; and Shreves knew that Browné's parting word was not the verdict of the world, or at least of this representative of it, in regard to his attentions to his *fiancée's* wealthy counterpart.

After exchanging civilities, that were barely civilities—he came directly to the object of his visit.

"I am here, Doctor, to consult you professionally, but not in my own behalf. I wish to lay be-

fore you the facts in a very peculiar and interesting case; and when I tell you that it is no more nor less than the explanation of the mysterious absences of our friend, Mr. Mordeck, I am sure you will grant me your attention and as much of your time as is at your disposal."

"Suppose I tell you that an explanation is unnecessary to me?" said the big physician stiffly.

Shreves was looking at him quietly, but his eyes dilated at this suggestion, then he shook his head slowly. "I beg your pardon, but I hardly think your association is such as to have disclosed to you—"

"True; you have the advantage over me there; but I do not have to see a man on a spree, to diagnose his case."

"Which careless diagnosis has led you to misjudge a friend, while my association with him has enabled me to defend his character against uncharitable assaults."

Had Shreves accepted the insult and retorted in like, hasty but upright Dr. Garrard would have considered himself justified in having offered it. He was disarmed, too, by the younger man's dignified, significant reply, and his curiosity was aroused to the nature of the case trumped up by this bold fortune-hunter for ingratiating himself still further into the favor of the family he seemed to have bewitched collectively and individually. In his inmost heart he did not wonder at any young man's preferring Browné Mordeck to any

other living girl even though fashioned by nature after the same pattern, for he was old and discerning enough to recognize in Browné a greater charm than her physical loveliness; but he thought his favorite's double, with her beautiful, soulless body, as he persisted in declaring it, was all the artist needed or appreciated; and he fussed and fumed mentally while forced to look on in silence at a clear case of mercenary action which Mr. Mordeck refused to see and Mrs. Mordeck unconsciously encouraged, and Browné did not know exactly what to think of, but which piqued and flattered and angered and pleased her in turn until she was in danger of getting under the influence of "the haughty young beggar" as hopelessly as was her fascinated, deluded father.

Shreves' call happened at an aggravated stage of this frame of mind; and Dr. Garrard's reception of him was hardly characteristic of society's favorite physician. His impoliteness did not extend, however, to as lengthy a silence as this digression would make it appear, and to Shreves' insinuation, unveiled as was the doctor's own, Dr. Garrard replied:

"If your knowledge affords an explanation more charitable than my surmises, I shall be glad to be convinced of my error, though a case of delirium tremens is a difficult thing to explain away."

Dr. Garrard knew this admission to be no betrayal of a friend, for he was aware of Thomas Mordeck's strange infatuation for the artist and

of the almost constant companionship of the two men during the past month; and he knew that if the millionaire was the wine-drinker he believed him to be, the impecunious bohemian was likely to be more familiar with the fact than he himself.

"Is it your professional opinion, Doctor," asked Shreves with deliberate carefulness that piqued Dr. Garrard's interest, "that upon the occasion you refer to Mr. Mordeck was suffering from a simple case of delirium tremens?"

"It was a case of very high delirium following a spree, to put it at its mildest," said the doctor dryly.

A short silence was broken by Shreves suggesting: "Would it be possible to mistake an epileptic frenzy for delirium tremens?"

"Eh? What the deuce do you know about epileptic frenzies?"

"Enough to know that Thomas Mordeck is a victim of the fearful malady known as masked epilepsy."

"Great heavens!"

He uttered no other word for a full minute; but his thoughts ran back with lightning-like rapidity over many scenes that went to strengthen this hypothesis. He got up and walked the length of the room, came back, resumed his seat, motioned Shreves to one nearer his own, and said with in-offensive peremptoriness:

"Tell me all you know about this."

Shreves did so without any circumlocution, and

in fifteen minutes Dr. Garrard was in possession of all the facts in the case, from Shreves Chilson's meeting with Mr. Mordeck and his recognition of him as Captain Dunbar, up to the epileptic seizure in which he was a witness of the change from one state of double consciousness to the other. The difference between the two recitals of the same story, as given Browné and Dr. Garrard, was what might be expected in a lover's version and a detective's.

To Dr. Garrard, Shreves dwelt upon the social, legal and moral complications of the case, and the apparently unsurmountable obstacles in the way of a quiet adjustment of the affair. When the doctor hinted that Mordeck was worth a good deal of money and could afford to do something handsome in order to relieve himself of such a peculiar embarrassment, Shreves grew a little white about the mouth and his eyes took on a darker hue as he informed the eminent physician very frankly that he was prepared to endure a good deal of injustice from the partisan of the Mordecks, understanding how his sympathy should all be with his friends, but that anything like disrespect to Mrs. Dunbar and her daughter would have to be answered for to him.

A brief glimpse of the Dunbar home life, comprehensive and self-explanatory as Shreves could make it, revealed to Dr. Garrard that the case they had to deal with was not the simple disposal of a superfluous wife and daughter, but also

of a husband who was as much of an entirety in the person of Captain Dunbar as was Thomas A. Mordeck himself. This started him upon a new line of thought, and, after a moment's silence, he startled Shreves by bringing his fist down upon the table and enunciating in a slow, emphatic tone: " 'Insanity being the result of physical disease, it is a matter of fact to be determined by medical experts, not a matter of law to be decided by legal tests and maxims.' "

Among the numerous treatises on insanity Shreves had read during the past month was Dr. Buckham's discussion of the disease in its medico-legal relations, and he recognized in Dr. Garrard's quotation a corollary to Dr. Buckham's definition of insanity. His knowledge was a key to the doctor's thoughts, and he replied quickly:

"There is no question of generosity or sacrifice on the part of the wives, medical or legal opinion on the part of doctors or lawyers; it is a moral problem to be solved by the unhappy man himself, for Captain Dunbar's impetuous love for his wife is as sincere as Mr. Mordeck's quiet devotion to his; and if medical experts decide which it is to whom he cleaves in his sane moments and succeed in establishing that sane identity as a fixity, it will rest with him and his conscience what shall be done for the victims of his irresponsibility."

"Which will be a matter settled by Thomas Mordeck making his will, then blowing out his brains," said Dr. Garrard with gloomy curtness.

"To prevent which," supplemented Shreves, "he must be gotten away from home and placed under surveillance before he learns the nature of his trouble and its terrible result."

"Who is to persuade Thomas Mordeck that he ought to go abroad, and that too, without his wife and children?"

Shreves was silent for a moment. "I had hoped, Dr. Garrard, that you would make suggestions instead of ridiculing my sincere efforts; and since Miss Mordeck has not left it optional with me what physician I shall consult, I shall have to beg you to be patient until I can make myself understood."

"Miss Mordeck? Does Browné Mordeck know her father's—"

"Misfortune? Yes."

"Who told her, and how did she bear it?"

"I told her, and she bore it as you or I or any one knowing her nobility, unselfishness and strength of character might have expected of her. This conference between us is to decide how long she is to bear alone the burden of knowledge."

Shreves had touched the right chord. Dr. Garrard folded his hands and fixed his eyes upon his visitor.

"Tell me your idea of what ought to be done," said he in a voice that precluded ridicule.

"When I said that Mr. Mordeck should be gotten away from home and placed under surveillance, I meant that he should be told enough con-

cerning his mental condition to induce him to go, not abroad, but merely to New York or some place east and put himself under the treatment of medical experts in some private hospital or sanitarium. Your knowledge of epileptic insanity enables you to accept my simple statement of what I saw in my rooms as proof of our friend's condition; but will Mrs. Dunbar or Mrs. Mordeck be content with it? Hardly; indeed, I am not content myself. I want more than one witness, and expert witnesses at that, to the transformation that took place under my eyes. Of course we cannot say how long he will have to remain at the hospital; it may be for six months, six weeks or six days; but from what I have learned of Mr. Mordeck's feelings in regard to his trouble he will, I think I can safely promise, submit himself entirely to your directions. It is for you to decide where he is to go and what is to be done after he gets there; and as no other step can be taken until the result of this one is known, we may as well maintain inviolate the secret that has existed unthreatened for more than a score of years. There will be years enough of misery for the two unhappy women after the truth can no longer be concealed."

Dr. Garrard remained in a profound study, commenting in no wise upon Shreves' suggestion and expressing neither approval nor disapproval. The younger and non-professional man was naturally embarrassed by the silence; but he felt that his

close and peculiar intimacy with Mr. Mordeck during a number of weeks, and the knowledge thus acquired, justified him in suggesting, if not advising, in a quarter where it would otherwise have been presumption.

"Mr. Chilson, I beg that you will not jump at conclusions in regard to the irrelevant, perhaps impertinent, question I am about to ask you. I have been listening to your plan, and it has awakened in me no little wonder, admiration and approval. I admit that the confidence reposed in you by Mordeck himself and your close intimacy with him have given you an advantage over both the medical and legal professions, and I, his physician, am not slow to recognize it; but I also recognize with a good deal of pleasure and curiosity that in your discovery and the subsequent course in regard to it, you have displayed sympathy, tact and a practical, honorable discretion; and at the risk of getting snubbed I am going to put to you a question that has tormented me, nay, badgered me, for the past fifteen minutes. With which family are your sympathy and interest? I cannot tell from your manner or from your words."

"And still less from my actions," said Shreves gloomily. "Dr. Garrard, I do not know which family, taken as a family, has my deepest sympathy. I only know that I am filled with remorse and hatred of myself when I recall all the misery I have unwittingly brought about. Mr. Mordeck is my friend; Captain Dunbar, if not an enemy,

is not a friend certainly. I pity Mrs. Mordeck from the depths of my heart, and I could cry like a girl when I picture the crushing misery the truth will be to her; but I stand appalled before the unimaginable effect revelation will have upon Mrs. Dunbar. As the nature of a kitten to that of a tigress, so is the nature of one of the women to that of the other. Mrs. Mordeck is a lovable little Christian woman, devoted to husband, children and home; and unless her husband is given back to her, mind and heart, after the truth has been revealed to her, she will gradually sink beneath her burden, and between the lines of her epitaph may be read, 'Died of a broken heart!' But who can say what will be the fate of her who has clung to her husband through mystery, shame and separation; has given up home, friends and the world for the brief, uncertain moments of happiness that have come to her so irregularly; has been content to evade the sneers of society by a nun-like seclusion more trammeling, but less satisfying, than complete renunciation. Who can form any conception of the passionate rebellion, the limitless despair that will be hers when she sees her husband taken away from her, not by death, nor the ravages of disease, nor by the assassin's weapon, nor fire, nor water, nor any mortal nor immortal power, but annihilated, proven never to have existed, his life shown to have been a dream, a hallucination—would to Heaven an angel might come down and take her to a Home where there

is no marrying or giving in marriage ere her mythical happiness is dispelled!"

"Grand, indeed, must be her character!" commented Dr. Garrard simply.

After a short silence he asked: "And which of the two girls will suffer the more keenly? A little while ago I would have considered the question unnecessary, but now— Well, I don't know how much of her mother's nature Miss Dunbar inherits."

"A good deal of her capability of enjoyment, but little for suffering. The loss of her father will not touch Naida's heart very deeply, and ere she feels the loss of his name I shall give her mine."

Dr. Garrard stared, a fixed, uncompromising stare. It was not within the scope of his worldly mind to conceive such disinterestedness. He had thought, without his thoughts assuming any tangible shape, that Shreves Chilson foresaw in this disastrous complication a loophole, and in the eyes of the world a justifiable loophole, of escape from a *mésalliance* to a union with beauty, wealth and position. He did not credit Shreves with being scoundrel enough to forsake his betrothed in her trouble, but he credited Miss Dunbar with a delicacy that would prompt a release, and Shreves with common sense enough not to decline it. But in the face of the frank assertion just made he stood dumb. After a moment he asked tentatively:

"Which am I to understand it is, Mr. Chilson,

love or duty that prompts you to this Quixotic course?"

"Simple justice is a sufficient motive, is it not?" replied Shreves evasively. "If by my luckless discovery I rob her of her name, it is but just that I should replace it with the only one in my power to give."

It was not because he thought there was any possibility of the hypothesis he was formulating ever being realized, but because he wished to sound the depth of the prodigal, almost disinherited, son's and impecunious artist's generosity that the doctor persisted incredulously:

"Would your disinterestedness extend so far as to do the same for Browné Mordeck were fate to decree her to be the nameless, homeless, penniless one?"

Dr. Garrard wondered at the subdued excitement, the vivid flash in the eyes instantly veiled, the noticeable trembling of his lips as Shreves tried to reply in a non-committal voice and manner:

"The one reparation that lies in my power shall be made, regardless of my own heart, regardless of what the world may say, to her whom my discovery robs of a name."

Dr. Garrard seized Shreves' hand, wrung it, and exclaimed with the last remnant of distrust banished:

"My young friend, you are worthy of the best woman the Good Master ever made; and if

Browné Mordeck could reach you through less murky waters, I could wish no safer harbor for her frail bark in the tempestuous life before her. You have unwittingly given me a glimpse into your heart, my boy. God pity you both if thus early you are to take up the burden of 'It might have been'!"

CHAPTER XXI.

SHREVES would have preferred seeing Dr. Garrard again before meeting Mr. Mordeck; but as the latter entered his studio he knew the interview was inevitable, and from a number of considerations he did not shrink from it. His influence over Mr Mordeck was greater than that of any other man, Dr. Garrard's not excepted, and for Browné's sake he was willing to exert it to the end in view, and that quickly.

The hardest part of the night just passed through was the helpless contemplation of a picture his fancy drew of Browné alone with her misery. The restless footfalls, swallowed up in the thick carpet ere their sound reached wondering ears, fell upon his heart with the increasing agony of a ceaseless dripping of water upon the head. She had bound herself to conceal her knowledge from those to whom it might be fatal; but this restraint did not extend to the privacy of her own room where, unseen and unheard, a vent might be found such as her nature demanded and the form and potency of which not even her mother could suspect. It would have been a relief to him to have known whether her grief and fear had found vent in tears and sobs, restless

wanderings and wringing of hands, or whether she had lain prone on her bed in mute agony, waiting for daylight and the reassuring presence of Dr. Garrard or himself.

The uncertainty had had its effect upon him, and as he went forward to greet Mr. Mordeck, each had cause to wonder at the altered appearance of the other. The elder man's face was haggard, his eyes sunken, his air and general bearing peculiar, even his voice was unnatural as he observed perfunctorily and without his wonted interest:

"You are looking pale and worried, Shreves."

"I fear you see but a reflection of your own face," returned Shreves, noting with sorrow the ravages of the past twenty-four hours. "You are taking your trouble too much to heart."

"Taking my trouble too much to heart?—bah! what a meaningless phrase! I might say the same to you if some careless hand should smear the paint on yonder canvas and efface the work of months. Trouble? trouble? What do you know about trouble, young man? Did you ever have a wife, a precious, loved little wife, to sob out her heart on your bosom and plead for an explanation you had no power to give?" He was standing in the middle of the room with his arms interlocked behind him, and with no trace of excitement in the large melancholy eyes bent upon Shreves.

"Poor little dear!" continued he, his voice and manner expressing not so much hopelessness as

benumbing despair, "she begged me to get drunk at home; she did not say that exactly, but it is what she meant, and to throw all the glasses at her head I pleased, and to turn our home into any sort of bedlam that suited my mood. It seemed only natural to her foolishly wise little heart that I should prefer a drinking-house and the company of strangers to my home, and the companionship of my wife and children when wallowing in this moral mire; but she tried to make me understand that it would be a pleasure to be permitted to watch over me, to care for me, to shield me from the world's scorn—Great God! that an angel should be yoked with a brute!"

Shreves flushed and paled by turns, and his lips trembled as if on the brink of unadvised disclosure. "Mr. Mordeck, you rave ignorantly. Look at yourself in that mirror; is that the face, are those the features of a wine-bibber, a whisky-bloat? Because an unconquerable thirst for wine assails you now and then, is that any reason for supposing that the entire period of your unconsciousness is spent in drinking and carousing? Consider for a moment how impossible it is that a man should become so steeped in wine as to be ignorant of his actions for days, weeks, months at a time, then suddenly become sober without a trace of the jailer of his senses during this long interval!"

"You mean by this, my young friend, that you don't believe me a drunkard," said he quietly.

"Not the debauchee, certainly, that you represent yourself to be. I know you drink sometimes—"

"Yes, drink to unconsciousness and acts of violence. Ethel told me of the glass I threw at her head. Poor little darling! she did not mean to let me find that out, and she cried herself sick over the betrayal. I was drunk that time, anyway; boisterously, beastly drunk, and Garrard knew it, so did Ethel; but the illness that followed softened their hearts until they pitied instead of condemning. Whether I have ever drunk to such an excess before or since I cannot say; but that is immaterial to me; I did it then and I may do it again."

He strode the length of the room and back, then resumed his stand near Shreves' easel, where the latter had placed himself some time before in order to relieve the awkwardness of their positions. Mr. Mordeck, however, preferred standing.

"Did you ever hear of a state of mind termed an 'alcoholic trance'?" he asked abruptly. Shreves said he had not. "I read a scientific article on the subject, and the writer asserts that 'the victim of an alcoholic trance, or alcoholic somnambulism, is literally an automaton and acts without memory or consciousness of passing events, a state which may last from a few minutes to several days.' If for several days, why not for several weeks or months? Among the numerous instances he cites is that of a banker who left his

regular work and went around delivering tracts in parts of the city almost unknown to him in his sober moments. Wherein does that differ from my leaving my business and going over to the North Side, diking myself out like a dandy, and doing God only knows what?"

"Where did you find that article?" demanded Shreves eagerly. He saw a possible explanation other than the repulsive theory of epilepsy, and recalling the slow swoon that preceded the transformation, the gradual sinking into insensibility totally free from convulsions of any sort, he was struck with the term, "alcoholic somnambulism," and determined to pursue the subject further. It suddenly occurred to him, however, that the swoon referred to marked the awakening of Mr. Mordeck from his temporary abnormal state of consciousness and not his immergence into the identity of Captain Dunbar. The only ground for an explanation of this scientific paradox was upon the hypothesis that he and Dr. Garrard had assumed the wrong state of double consciousness for the sane man.

The mere thought of such a possibility made his heart beat fiercely. He could not deliberately have speculated upon his own chances of happiness out of this chaos of misery; but if at the last moment a sacrifice should be substituted for his immolated love, he would be more than an Abraham to thrust it from him. But Shreves was not even an Abraham; he was an adoring lover, with



all the selfishness pertaining thereto, and no amount of heroic resolving beforehand or abject repenting afterward could prevent his stealing a glimpse now and then into a future glorified by the companionship of Browné Mordeck.

The gulf between Browné and happiness was dark and deep, but there were moments when Shreves felt as if his love could bridge it. In such moods he passionately prayed for her at any cost; but in other and more generous moments he knew that he would rather stand on one side of the gulf and look across at her proud, honored, but lonely, than see her humiliated, disgraced, but upheld by his devotion.

Mr. Mordeck had long ago answered his question as to where the article on Alcoholic Trances might be found; but Shreves' interest was abating, or rather, his multifarious theories were beginning to confuse him; and since the result would be the same, it being impossible to explain away the duality of the millionaire and the gambler, it was useless to try to anticipate the specific nature of the cause. Shreves saw in the turn the conversation had taken an opening for the suggestion considered so difficult by Dr. Garrard, and the fact that he was to see Browné in a few hours and report to her what step had been taken nerved him to a delicate and unpleasant duty he would otherwise have liked at least to share with Mr. Mordeck's physician.

"Mr. Mordeck, you know too much and yet not

enough of your condition ever again to be content with the semi-mystery of your actions; and if you will permit me I will make a suggestion which, I think, the knowledge acquired in the past twenty-four hours and a consultation with your family physician warrant me in assuming the responsibility of making?"

"What is your suggestion?"

"I would advise you to place yourself under medical treatment, not that of Dr. Garrard, or any general practitioner, but to give up your business for a while, go east to some private hospital or sanitarium, and put yourself in the hands of specialists on nervous diseases."

"You believe me insane, then?" he said without any show of surprise or excitement.

"How could I presume to have an opinion on so grave a subject? I only know the palpable facts in the case, that there is a periodical and temporary unsoundness of mind which is accounted for by you and myself upon different grounds, and by neither satisfactorily; and it is to ascertain the cause and nature of these blanks in memory that I would have you submit yourself for a time to constant and expert surveillance."

"Does Dr. Garrard advise this?"

"He does."

"Why?"

"Because neither he nor any other physician could watch you here at home closely enough to prevent your eluding them at the critical moment."

"When these spells come on, you mean," he asserted rather than asked. After a moment he continued: "You witnessed one of these attacks; what is your theory?"

"So multiform as to be utterly useless," said Shreves with hasty dismissal of the subject. "Why not avail yourself of the opportunity offered you to obtain an opinion in which you would have confidence and which would not stop at an explanation, but would seek to remedy the evil?"

"You say there are private hospitals I could go to for examination and treatment without the affair becoming food for gossip?"

"Any number of them; and in your case, absence would not occasion the least comment."

"It is an ill wind that blows nobody any good," quoted Mr. Mordeck with sententious bitterness.

"I was unfortunate in my allusion."

"By no means; you have unconsciously used your strongest argument in favor of the experiment. I think it is very probable that I shall follow your advice if I do not conclude to end the affair by taking an overdose of something."

"You are a man of too much character to yield to weakness of that sort," said Shreves, carefully repressing all signs of credulity.

"I don't know about the strength of character, but a surer safeguard for me is my selfish love for my wife and children."

No comment could add anything to an assertion of this nature, and Shreves remained silent,

his thoughts taking a turn that proved repugnantly surprising to himself. He did not for a moment wish for so easy a solution of the problem as the quiet and voluntary or involuntary death of the unconscious cause of the impending misery and disgrace; but he found himself dwelling with regret upon the impracticability of the only means that promised deliverance to the innocent victims of a still more innocent crime. All jealousy would be buried in his grave, each loved one could mourn for the husband or father, remember the joy his life had afforded, the shame his death had prevented, and look forward to a reunion where there is no marrying or giving in marriage, and none to be called Father save One. Shreves sighed and brought his thoughts back to a realization of existing circumstances.

"Mr. Mordeck, for the love you bear your wife and children you will not, I am sure, neglect any opportunity that promises a solution, perhaps dispelling, of the mystery shrouding your life."

"I told you I had placed myself in your hands. Tell me what to do and I will do it."

"Let us go to see Dr. Garrard, then, for the first thing."

"Will there be a consultation of physicians, a cross-examination, and all that sort of thing?"

"Nothing of the kind. Dr. Garrard will probably suggest some private hospital and give you a letter of introduction to the physician in charge. If you wish me to accompany you to New York,

or wherever he advises you to go, I shall be glad to do so, and to remain as long as I can be of either service or pleasure to you. If you decide to go away, when could you be ready to start?"

"To-night. My business is always in a shape to leave," said he with bitter significance.

"What explanation will you make to your family?"

"What explanation have I given them for the last twenty years? Not a word! We will not bother about that now; it may be my last absence." There was nothing of hopefulness in his tone, and Shreves' own thoughts were too gloomy to admit of offering comfort to another. All pity for Mrs. Mordeck's ignorance and anxiety was swallowed up by a sense of stern justice that crept into Shreves' heart and made him feel that it was but right that the consideration denied one wife should be withheld from the other.

Mr. Mordeck, however, evidently considered his determination cruel, for he added in a softened voice: "I will send Ethel a letter by you, Shreves. She has had mystery enough in her life without this needless addition."

"Why not see her yourself and tell your family good-by? A trip to New York is a very ordinary thing."

"I do not wish to tell them good-by. I have a presentiment that it is to be a final one. I could not go through with it," he added, his voice and

manner neither dismal nor prophetic, only profoundly melancholy.

They proceeded in silence to Dr. Garrard's office, and were ushered into a private room where the doctor saw them at once. . . . After a while Shreves and Dr. Garrard came out, leaving Mr. Mordeck alone to write the letter to his wife.

Shreves called at Michigan Avenue late in the evening and asked for Mrs. and Miss Mordeck. The former excused herself on the plea of a headache which had driven her to retire early, and the latter was found in the small parlor ensconced in a large chair before a blazing fire. His presence was not noted until he stood beside her chair and bent over to see if the closed eyes meant sleep.

She lifted her lids, heavy with unshed tears, and caught the unguarded look in his eyes. A radiant look overspread her face and she half whispered:

"Oh, Shreves, it was a dream after all!"

"What was a dream, dear?" he asked in a tone not to startle her.

"That there is another girl just like me, and we have the same father and the same lover and—" Her eyes suddenly dilated and she sprang from her chair in full consciousness of her surroundings and what had taken place. "What brings you here at this hour?" she exclaimed.

"I came to tell you what I have done to-day,

and to bring a letter to your mother from your father."

"Has papa gone again?"

"Yes; but this time voluntarily and with the hope, at least on the part of Dr. Garrard and myself, that he may soon return a different man."

"Too different, perhaps, for mamma's and Tom's and my happiness!" said she, without weighing and far from realizing the full meaning of her words.

"Browné, you do not seriously fear that, do you?"

"Fear, fear! why shouldn't I fear? Is epilepsy so simple a thing that a recognition of it is all that is necessary to effect a cure?"

"Perhaps we have made a mistake, it may not be epilepsy, it may—"

"What, another mistake! Have you pursued poor papa to the very gates of an insane asylum, as I did you, only to discover the truth of the old adage that 'A little learning is a dangerous thing'? Great Heavens! society is in danger while two such geniuses are at large."

"Browné, you talk wildly. I do not pretend to say what produces this state of double consciousness in your father's mind, whether it be epilepsy, alcohol, morphine or what; but I know that state of double consciousness to exist, and your father, in consequence of it, to lead two separate and distinct lives, for which irresponsible crime some

one will have to suffer. It behooves me, as the unhappy discoverer of the facts, to lessen the suffering as much as lies in my power."

"Oh, Shreves Chilson, what perverse destiny gave to you this fatal knowledge?"

"Rather, what kind providence, Browné?" said Shreves with tender reproach. "Think how **wide-spread** would have been your father's secret had one less interested than I suspected what I have suspected for more than a month and witnessed what I so recently witnessed in my rooms."

"Less interested? Who could be less interested in our vindication than you? Mamma dishonored, Tom and I made outcasts, means for you a bride with name, fortune, and position—oh, Shreves, forgive me! I think I have been crazy since you were here last." His face frightened her, as it had done that day on the train when his long white fingers encircled her throat, and she took a step toward him with eager entreaty in her eyes as she repeated her plea for forgiveness.

"You are cruelly unjust in your misery, I cruelly selfish in my love, and as you hope to be forgiven you must forgive. Listen then, Browné Mordeck, listen to words I had hoped to be too generous, too honorable to utter. I love you, I love you so passionately, so worshipfully that I would willingly sacrifice your mother, your brother, your name, fortune and position to win you for my wife. Go! don't tempt me further. You are not destined for such a fate, and every word you

wring from me is a robbery of her to whom you have left nothing but my name!"

She turned and left the room, as if not daring to disobey his command, but was called back instantly with even more imperiousness.

"Come back, Browné; we have no time to nurse our own heartaches, a graver burden rests on our shoulders. I came to deliver this letter to your mother, but I shall have to entrust it to you; see that it is placed in her hands to-night. I don't know that it is especially important, but it is from your father, explaining his absence, I think, in so far as he himself knows the cause of it, and I should like to be sure that she gets it; for there are weeks of weary waiting before her, I fear."

"You have not told me where papa has gone."

"He is on his way to the — Sanitarium, in New York State. He started by the Lake Shore route at 8 o'clock this evening. Dr. Garrard and I leave on the 11.30 train to-night and overtake him at Detroit in the morning. He was restless and eager to take the first step in the course he has decided upon, and desirous of evading the partings he felt himself unequal to in his present condition. His letter will, I think, satisfy your mother; and you must be a brave girl and ward off suspicion until I return with further directions. Our train leaves in an hour and I shall have to say good-by. I will bring you the earliest news possible."

When Shreves was gone, Browné went to her mother's room and found her in bed but awake.

"Is your head not better, mamma?"

"It is not my head, Browné, it is my heart," and the words proving a floodgate to her pent-up emotion, she buried her face in the pillows and sobbed like a child.

"Fie, fie, mamma! what a baby. Here is a bon-bon for you in the shape of a note from papa; Mr. Chilson brought it around—ah! I have brought you a cure for your heartache, have I?"

Mrs. Mordeck devoured the contents of the short note, and handed it to her daughter with a contented sigh. "See how foolish I was to imagine I had offended your dear father."

Browné read:

"LITTLE WIFE:—You have been my shield against the world's curiosity during all these years of mystery. Be patient and trust me a little longer and I will come back to you soon, never more to be called away on business where you may not accompany me. Don't think I was angry because I left you so abruptly to-day; I could not give you the explanation you asked, and it hurt me more to refuse than you to be refused.

"If I am detained longer than I anticipate you shall be acquainted with the reasons therefor, and use your own judgment about joining me.

"Always faithfully

"YOUR HUSBAND."

Browné read and re-read the short letter and mused over it wonderingly, trying to imagine her

father's theory of his own case and to divine the hope, the ground for the hope, pervading it. She crossed over to the bed and bent over her mother. She was asleep, with tears on her long lashes and a smile on her lips. Browné stooped and kissed her and fell on her knees beside the bed.

"Dear mamma, dear Tom, dear Heavenly Father, help me to make the sacrifice cheerfully!"

CHAPTER XXII.

THE first week of Mr. Mordeck's absence was to Shreves a period of physical monotony and mental commotion. He made no pretense whatever of doing anything in his studio, and his fellow-bohemians began to fear that he was weakening toward art, and mercenarily considering tobacco. His betrothed arched her brows and looked ineffably bored as he discussed with her mother every topic under the sun save art and love, and to escape the ennui of such evenings she developed all at once an insatiable fondness for amusements. Shreves, on the alert for some means of entertaining his *fiancée* other than by the old form of pedestal worship, seized early upon the half-hints, half-requests, and secured tickets for every amusement to be had during Lent.

He saw Browné twice during the week, once at early morning service and once in her own home; but he had no news for her, and loyalty to Naida made the meetings stupid and painful.

The second week he put in differently, and in a way to lessen the tension on thoughts and feelings. He frequented the haunts of Captain Dunbar, and learned from the gambler's associates something of the character he bore among them and the estimation in which he was held. The

most surprising thing to Shreves was their lack of curiosity in regard to the captain's periodical disappearances, and he came to the conclusion that suspicion is awakened more readily by trifles light as air than by facts weighty as lead. He also found that the belief intimated in the assertion of Patrick, the janitor of the Exeter, to the effect that he never "poked his finger in a detective's pie," was a commonly accepted one in the various lodging-houses Captain Dunbar had patronized during the past score or more of years. His entering in one garb and going out in another, and returning after a while to resume his former dress, together with his careful instructions in regard to the trunk he left in their care sometimes for months at a time, all tended to strengthen the impression that he was engaged in secret service of some kind.

This explained to a certain extent how the secret had been kept all these years; but Shreves could not help feeling that a higher, or a lower, hand had had something to do with shielding the victim of Nature's curse from the world's scorn and punishment.

By the close of the second week of Mr. Mordeck's absence, Shreves had obtained a connected history of Captain Dunbar's life, the blanks being filled in by his acquaintance with Mr. Mordeck's history, and so simple, open and consistent a life-story shook to the very center his certainty of Captain Dunbar's insanity.

He was in that expectant mood that comes to all of us at times when we watch the door and look over our shoulders for the reappearance of the friend or loved one whose dead face we have looked at in its coffin, and over whose body we have heard the clods rattle. He had seen the identity of Captain Dunbar merged into that of Mr. Mordeck, and he knew the latter to be hundreds of miles away, yet he would not have been surprised to have looked up and seen the handsome, sneering face of the gambler and heard him demand in his soft, cynical voice, "What do you think now?" Shreves could not have answered the question. He knew the thought his wish would have fathered; but as to the actual result, he could no more anticipate it than he could influence it.

He was aroused from his brooding reverie by the abrupt entrance of Dr. Garrard.

"Read that!" said Dr. Garrard, thrusting a dispatch at him without responding to his greeting.

"Come immediately; bring Mr. Chilson. Nothing serious, but puzzling. X."

"What do you fear?" asked Shreves.

"The confounded expertness of these experts!" said the doctor laconically. "Can you go? The first train leaves in just three-quarters of an hour."

"I can be ready in ten minutes."

The assistant physicians at the Sanitarium

were strolling the corridor with their hands in their pockets and whistling softly, ever now and then casting at a closed door glances that betrayed not a little curiosity as to what was going on inside. Dr. A halted Dr. B by pausing in front of him.

"The young fellow is on our side," said A.

"What makes you think so?"

"When he came he called for Captain Dunbar."

"He knew him first under that name," said B.

"Yes, I know; but the slip of the tongue betrayed his thoughts."

"I'd like to know the history of this case."

"Maybe Dr. X will call us in when they begin the history—or rather, the histories, for there are two, to be told by the respective friends of the different phases of life. Gad! it's a pretty puzzle if anybody is concerned in it besides himself."

An electric bell sounded. "That's for Jerry now, to summon us perhaps," said Dr. B, and disappeared into his office, followed by Dr. A.

In due time Jerry came to the door with the anticipated message, and they repaired at once to Dr. X's office.

"My assistants, Drs. A and B; Dr. Garrard, Mr. Chilson. I want you," turning to the young physicians, "to listen attentively to what these two gentlemen are going to tell us about the patient we are so occupied with just now. Dr. Garrard is Mr. Mordeck's physician, and Mr. Chilson is Captain Dunbar's son-in-law-elect."

The two younger physicians cast quick, sympathetic glances at Shreves, and, recalling the consultation held in that office the day before, and supposing that Dr. X had acquainted Mr. Mordeck's friends with the result of it, thought that they understood the peculiar light in his eyes, the undefined smile about his mouth. Shreves, however, was unconscious of the belying reflection in his face; he was conscious of but one line of reasoning: namely, that there was enough uncertainty in Browne's position to make thoughts of her no disloyalty to Naida. Indeed, he no longer had any betrothed; fate was to choose his bride for him.

After some general conversation Dr. X turned to Dr. Garrard. "We will continue, Doctor, with the patient's history."

"My acquaintance with Mordeck began about the close of the war," resumed Dr. Garrard. "I knew him first as the husband of Ethel Browne. General Browne was killed in battle in '63, leaving his wife with a goodly fortune and one child. Mrs. Browne's heart and almost her mind were buried in the grave with her husband; and from that time until her death, three years later, she led a listless, aimless, and indifferent life. Under her guardianship Ethel did pretty much as she pleased with herself and her money, and when she bestowed both upon a stranger whom she had met at a military ball in New York the first year of the war, there was of course some comment

upon her mother's indifference to the important step she was taking. But Ethel's handsome young husband was a man in whom people instinctively had confidence, and his quiet dignity and gravity, marked even in his younger days, repelled any curiosity that may have been felt. Whether Mordeck had anything when he married Ethel Browne I don't know, I am inclined to think he had not; but before five years had gone by, he had doubled her fortune, established the reputation of being one of the most successful young men in Chicago, taken his place in the first society of our city, shared with Ethel the blessings of her dying mother, and thus won the right, or at least the power, to withhold from the world, without awakening suspicion, any information he chose to keep locked within his own breast. These periodical disappearances might have occasioned comment had it not been for the prudence of his family. Even I have suspected only in the last year that they were as ignorant as the rest of us as to his whereabouts and his business. The children, accustomed from childhood to these absences, took them as a matter of course, I presume, and felt no curiosity; and the wife's faith, loyalty and devotion did the rest. God pity her if she must know that her husband's allegiance has been divided!"

"I beg your pardon, Doctor, but you have hastened over points that will assist us most in our diagnosis. May I put a few questions to you?"

"Certainly."

"You tell us that Mrs. Mordeck met her husband in New York, but you do not say whether he was a citizen or merely a native of the state, who had come to the city to join his regiment and was awaiting a summons to the field; neither do you tell us anything of his war record."

"I don't know anything about either," said Dr. Garrard shortly. It had never occurred to him how little he did know until he endeavored to put his friend's history into words; and he realized that there was a background to Thomas A. Mordeck's life darker than any of the spots shadowing the period known to him.

"I have always been under the impression that he was a New Yorker, of the city as well as the state, though I don't believe I have ever heard him refer to his past, and I know he received a wound in his first battle that disabled him for future service."

"You refer to the depression of the skull which has led us to diagnose his case as one of traumatic epilepsy?"

The younger physicians inferred from this that the discussion previous to their entrance had been in regard to the nature of Mr. Mordeck's trouble, and that Dr. X had not yet announced the verdict of the official consultation that had necessitated the dispatch.

"Traumatism," said Dr. Garrard reflectively, "might account for more in Mordeck's case than

masked epilepsy and double consciousness. A blow on the head producing such a state of mind might also cloud one's memory of past events to such an extent that one would be afraid to trust to it for early impressions; and if such were the case with Mordeck, his sensitiveness would keep him silent in regard to a past of which he has only a confused recollection, perhaps no recollection at all; for the blow may have blotted out all memory of the past and rendered the years previous to the injury an utter blank. In that case a successful trephining might lift the veil for us and for him, and his reserve thus be proven to be from ignorance and not from motives of concealment. Why not operate at once; you intend to operate, do you not?"

"Yes, when we are thoroughly satisfied that the epilepsy is traumatic."

"Why—ah—is not Mordeck's evident forgetfulness of his early life a strong proof of it?"

"But how do you account for Captain Dunbar's, or our present patient's, frankness in regard to his past?" said Dr X.

"Fantastic lies born of an unsound mind trip lightly from an irresponsible tongue."

Resentment flashed in every glance except Shreves'. His face betrayed no emotion whatever. He had noticed by what name Dr. X spoke of the man under his treatment, and the slip was significant to him of the fact that whatever the name of the man committed to the Sanitarium

two weeks before, and whatever the opinion arrived at by the physician in charge, there had been a change of identity, of aggressive identity, that could not be ignored, and which had now produced the same influence upon these professional men that it had upon himself. He felt no excitement over the possible result of this interview; he had shifted the burden of responsibility to other shoulders and left his thoughts in suspense. It was for the doctors to decide, then he would act. He noticed the sympathy in Dr. X's voice as the doctor requested him to tell them all he knew about Captain Dunbar's life, in order that the two histories might be compared by unbiased and disinterested parties.

"I have known Captain Dunbar hardly more than six months," said he, "and his history prior to that time I know only through himself, his family and his associates. He was born in Alabama 45 years ago, and his father was a slave-owner and cultivated a large plantation. When the war broke out he enlisted in an Alabama regiment and received a wound in his first battle. He was taken to the hospital and nursed back to health by Marguerite Tiercourt, a patriotic southern girl who had cast her girlhood aside and gone into the hospital to administer to those who fell in defending her home and the land she loved. One day among the wounded grays taken from an ambulance was a boy in blue. No one could account for his presence; but he was taken

in and nursed with the rest. After weeks of hovering between life and death he recovered consciousness, and astonished his nurse and physician by asking after a number of boys in this southern regiment. When he was well enough to be questioned they passed him through a rigid examination; but his answers were so straightforward and consistent that they were forced to believe him, even though he frankly admitted that he knew no more than they did how he came to be wearing the blue instead of the gray. Whether it was he that suggested it or some one else, the hypothesis advanced and readily credited was that a Yankee in a strait had exchanged clothes with the dead rebel to make easier his escape. An earnest appeal for help came from the South about that time, and the matter was dropped with less rigid investigation than would otherwise have been the case. However, you who know Captain Dunbar," said Shreves pointedly, "can appreciate how readily he can win the confidence of those he chooses to make his friends. Before responding to the appeal from the South, he was married to his pretty Florence Nightingale by the chaplain of the hospital."

"Married to her? married in '62?" exclaimed one of the young doctors, betraying by his excitement in which direction his sympathy lay.

Dr. Garrard knew the young man's sympathy to be misplaced, or, rather, to be bestowed upon a wrong hypothesis; nevertheless it exasperated

him and he chilled the excited discoverer with a tolerant explanation.

"Priority of marriage cuts no figure in the case; responsibility is the thing to be determined."

"When did Mrs. Dunbar next see her husband?"

"Not until the close of the war. He met her unexpectedly at Richmond; and both having lost everything by the war, they came to Chicago to live—very much against her will, she told me, for she naturally felt bitterly toward the North. Captain Dunbar said he could not make a living in the South, and if she loved him she would follow him. To know Mrs. Dunbar is to know the strength of this appeal. To all appearances he is, and always has been, a gambler, supporting his wife and their child in luxury and making up in devotion, when with her, for his long, unexplained absences. There is no effort at keeping up the deception of his life; neither he nor his wife know of any necessity for it. She withdrew herself from the world because of her humiliating position as a gambler's wife, but never in thought or word repented the hasty marriage that ostracized her from the world in which she had been reared."

Shreves paused, as if he had told all that was necessary.

"The gentleman's history is altogether the most interesting I ever listened to; but we are not detectives and we know enough of it for our purposes. The question with us is neither did he, nor how did he, deceive the world? We know he has

done so for over twenty years, and it is for us to seek to prevent further crime and to ascertain which has been the responsible and which the irresponsible life."

"Have you any doubt upon the subject?" demanded Dr. Garrard with a fierceness born of a vague uneasiness.

"Very little, but I admit the possibility of being mistaken. Two weeks ago you placed in our charge a quiet, melancholy man very reticent in regard to his past and hopeless as to his future. He ate little, slept less, and shunned the society of every one. Three days ago he demanded wine; we gave it to him in order to observe the natural course of his disease. After drinking to an excess, he sank into a stupor which lasted for a few hours, and out of which he arose a new and different man. He got up from his couch, pushed his hair off his forehead, glanced down at his clerical-looking garment, shrugged his shoulders and made a jolly grimace at his nurse, then without saying a word, he went to his trunk,—not the trunk Mr. Mordeck used, but the one Mr. Chilson requested to have placed in his room—and redressed himself from hat to shoes. He strolled leisurely out of his room, his attendant following him, of course, and came down to the office. He asked for the clerk and wanted to look over the register. We guessed his motive at once; he thought he was at a hotel and wanted to post himself as to its name, etc., so as not to be taken at a disadvantage. The

act was a very shrewd one for an insane, a prudent one for a sane, man. I told him he had been ill, and, being a stranger in our town, had been brought to our hospital. He showed no surprise and asked no questions at the time; but I find he has posted himself pretty thoroughly in regard to the place in the last day or two. He has won the friendship of all who have been thrown with him, and he has displayed no impatience at his detention here until this morning. He talks freely of his wife and beautiful daughter, and says he is compelled to be away from them so much that he is chary of the time that is his to devote to them. I explained to him that in consequence of the nature of his trouble, about which, by the way, he evinced no curiosity, it would be better for him to remain under our treatment a while longer. I shall not be satisfied until I witness a second transformation. I have seen Mordeck change into Dunbar, now I want to see Dunbar change into Mordeck."

"You profess so little doubt as to the same identity," observed Dr. Garrard, "I wonder you hesitate to operate at once."

"I confess that my confidence in traumatism as the original cause of the epilepsy has been somewhat shaken by Mr. Chilson's story."

"Why, how is that? It seems to me to strengthen the theory; the fact of there never having been any epilepsy until that fracture of the skull—"

"I beg your pardon, but how do we know there never was? We have a partial history of Captain Dunbar's early life, but we know absolutely nothing of Mr. Mordeck's. I am prepared to affirm that the case under discussion is one of masked epilepsy; but what grounds have we for assuming that Captain Dunbar's early life is a myth; that he was an insane man when he enlisted in the Alabama regiment; insane when he fought bravely through the whole war as a staunch southerner, save during that short period, of which he has no recollection, when during just such a seizure as we have witnessed he might have strayed from his command, changed his dress with the facility with which you are all acquainted, enlisted in the Union army, attended a military ball, met and fallen in love with Miss Browne, and then gone into the field to be wounded and guided back by destiny into the cause from which he had strayed?"

"Great Heavens, sir! you don't mean to say that you are debating the matter seriously?" exclaimed Dr. Garrard, the last one to see the drift of Dr. X's argument.

"I do, sir; and I go still further and say that I believe the man you brought here two weeks ago to have been insane, and the one now with us to be in his right mind," affirmed Dr. X, also becoming excited.

His excitement had the effect of quieting Dr. Garrard; and the latter remarked after a silence

the younger men did not presume to break: "You are delivering the opinion of a recognized expert, Dr. X, and I am in no position to refute it; but it seems impossible to me that a positive identity could be denied to Thomas Mordeck, yes, impossible, impossible."

"Perhaps it does not seem impossible to Mr. Chilson, who has known our patient personally in both states of consciousness."

"I?" said Shreves vaguely. Without any outward show of the fact, he had experienced all the sensations of a swoon. Never before had his happiness been brought within his reach, and he had not been aware how little hope he had been feeding his heart upon until he felt the rapturous shock Dr. X's bold assertion was to him. After a moment the knowledge of a possibility of his cup being dashed from his lips crept in and steadied him, though it could not prevent his heart's rushing out toward Browné, unchecked by conscience.

"May I see—the man into whom my friend has been transformed?" said Dr. Garrard with emotion.

Dr. X touched the bell. "Jerry, have Smith bring Captain Dunbar into my parlor."

CHAPTER XXIII.

AS Mr. Smith conducted Captain Dunbar past the door of the general reception room, up the broad stairs and into Dr. X's parlor, the captain observed with cynical incredulity:

"Am I to be favored above my fellow-lunatics?"

"My orders, sir, were to bring you to the doctor's own parlor to see some gentlemen who have come to visit you."

"Ah-h! Perhaps I shall learn to whom I am indebted for being shut up in a place like this." He entered the room and met Shreves advancing toward him with extended hand. "It is you, then, is it? I suspected as much," said he, deliberately placing his hands behind his back, and flashing a look at Shreves from his fierce, dark eyes, that glowed like coals of fire through his pallor.

"I am sorry, Captain, you have no other greeting for—"

"I am sorry, sir, that we are not in the public reception room where I could greet you as you deserve to be—as a traitor!"

Shreves set his teeth hard and kept his temper.

"Why are you my enemy, Captain Dunbar?"

"Why? why? I never knew myself until now. Instinct warned me against you from the first, and

your constant dogging of my footsteps boded me no good, as my present situation proves; for you have trapped me and learned—God only knows what, I don't!"

It was Captain Dunbar's first admission of ignorance in regard to any part of his life, and even now the confession was followed quickly by a cold, shrewd look and a careless laugh.

"I beg your pardon, Dr. X, but none of us are proof against unpleasant surprises. I understood there were two gentlemen to see me."

"Here is a fellow-townsmen of yours, Dr. Garrard."

"How do you do, Doctor? I know you by reputation, but have never had the pleasure of meeting you before."

Dr. Garrard exchanged the cold formalities of an utter stranger, and turned away with tears in his eyes. An awkward pause might have followed had it not been for an interruption of nature's.

The epileptic seizures that had for the past year been growing shorter and more frequent now began to assume a more pronounced epileptic form, and as Captain Dunbar released Dr. Garrard's hand he threw both of his own up to his head, whirled around two or three times and fell to the floor, striking Shreves a terrible blow as he went down. After a slight convulsion of the limbs he settled down into the motionless and profound stupor that marked the attack witnessed by Shreves.

"Was he seized this way before?" inquired Dr. X of Shreves.

"Not exactly; he put his hands to his head in a vague, bewildered sort of way and gradually sank to the floor. There was no excitement or violence in the attack. I guessed what was coming just now and sprang forward to catch him, but was too late."

"Yes, too late to help him, but a little too soon for your own good," said Dr. X, observing the tentative motion of Shreves' arm as he endeavored to ascertain the extent of his injury.

There was nothing to be done for the prostrate man save to straighten him out and put a rest under his head, then wait for the attack to expend itself. In the mean time Drs. X and Garrard entered into a discussion of epilepsy, technical, scientific and comprehensive, the result of which was a convergence of opinions, with conditional admissions on both sides and a prospect of a harmonious and concerted action when the final step was to be taken.

Taking it for granted that this attack would expend itself as did the former, and that Mr. Mordeck would be reassured by his presence, Shreves stood by and anxiously watched for signs of returning consciousness. After an interval, under which even the physicians began to be restless, Shreves observed a spasmodic motion of the lids; and then the eyes flew open in a vacant, roving stare. The doctors dropped simultaneously upon

their knees, each seizing a wrist of their patient and gazing into his face with a critical anxiety. . . . Shreves turned away. Was this the end? Was death solving the problem? A keen pain revealed how selfishly his heart cried out against losing his friend. He heard Dr. X order him, the nameless creature who was no longer either Captain Dunbar or Mr. Mordeck, to be carried to his room, and was conscious of being motioned back when he would have followed. After a half-hour, or more, he was sent for, and was stationed with Dr. A and a nurse to watch by the bedside while Drs. X and Garrard closeted themselves for a consultation.

Dr. Garrard returned in the course of an hour, called Shreves aside, and said in a tone that admitted of no argument:

"Chilson, we must go for Mrs. Mordeck and Mrs. Dunbar."

When they were seated in the train that was to bear them back to Chicago and were fairly under headway, Shreves turned to his companion.

"Doctor, what does this mean?"

"It means," said Dr. Garrard, squaring himself for as lengthy a discussion of the subject as should prove desirable, "that our friend is in a dying condition; mind, I don't say he is dying; but the odds are against him, and we, Dr. X and myself, are not willing to assume the responsibility of all the disastrous possibilities that could arise from these two unfortunate women's being kept in ig-

norance until the husband they both claim is dead and powerless to say yea or nay to the accusations brought against him. Who knows but that in their grief and rage and incredulity they might fling themselves into the hands of lawyers and detectives, and thus bring irrevocable confusion upon their own heads? They must both see him while he is yet alive; and now is the best time, for he belongs to neither of them; he is unconscious of the past, present and future, and is wandering in a psychological maze beyond our ken. His present condition will help them to realize the state of mind we shall testify to, and with death or imbecility staring them in the face they may be spared the jealousy of his affection that would have been felt with him living and in his right mind, and the jealousy of their children's name and inheritance with him dead."

"Doctor, you speak of only two alternatives, death or imbecility; is there no other?"

"There is one chance in a hundred for ultimate discovery and complete restoration of mind; but the operation offering this one chance and ninety-nine mischances is attended with so much risk that we desire the consent of some one nearer him than ourselves before we undertake it."

"Who is to prepare them for this meeting?"

"I shall break it to Mrs. Mordeck, of course, and you to Mrs. Dunbar."

"I cannot do it."

"Yes, you can; you would be the last one to leave her to hear the truth from a stranger!"

After a silence of several miles Dr. Garrard, unsolicited by Shreves, began and acquainted him with all that had taken place in the consulting interview between himself and Dr X.

Disregarding previous histories, an acceptance of which would be deciding the case without further argument, and taking up the case at the date of the first transformation to which they had a witness, Dr. X was willing to admit that the burden of the proof of a sane identity was in favor of Mr. Mordeck, but the subtler and more convincing evidence was on Captain Dunbar's side. The periodical attacks claimed by Dr. Garrard for Mr. Mordeck were pronounced lucid intervals by Dr. X in Captain Dunbar's case; the painful recognition of some mysterious malady and the excessive carefulness in preparing therefor became in Dr. X's eyes and vocabulary profound melancholia and cunning shrewdness. Statistics showed that many an insane man had amassed a fortune, been a successful novelist, journalist or inventor, and had been considered only a little queer, until tottering reason was dethroned and some direful deed furnished a key to long years of irresponsibility. Dr. X supplemented this, in rebuttal of the argument that called it forth, that the explanation of Captain Dunbar's having chosen to be a gambler instead of attempting to follow some honest business was in

harmony with the feverish eagerness he displayed to concentrate all the pleasure and affection possible in the short intervals of conscious life allotted him.

Shreves listened to Dr. Garrard's self-evident arguments and his conscientious repetition of Dr. X's more scientific and metaphysical reasoning, until his brain was in a whirl and the action of his mind was reduced to a single monotonous query, rhythmically adapted to the revolutions of the wheels beneath him; Dunbar or Mordeck? Dunbar or Mordeck?

"It's an extraordinary case," pursued Dr. Garrard, "and one that none of us will ever be quite satisfied about, unless the trephining is successful and we restore to life the original and responsible man and let him establish his own identity."

"Is such a result possible?"

"More than possible, yet hardly probable. Such operations are common in cases of traumatic epilepsy, but they are attended with some risk and the results are discouragingly uncertain. However, a remarkable instance of this nature was reported in a southern medical journal a few years ago. A man received a fracture of the skull when a mere boy, and was troubled with mild epileptic seizures at intervals for twenty years. He married in the mean time and reared a family. The attacks suddenly grew so frequent and violent that it was thought necessary to operate. After a successful trephining, the man returned to conscious-

ness and found all the years intervening between the accident and the operation a blank. He had to be introduced to his wife and children and begin life anew."

"What if our friend proves to be neither Mordeck nor Dunbar?"

"We already have two horns to our dilemma; don't add a third," said Dr. Garrard dryly. "We don't anticipate anything of that kind, however; though I cannot say the history of the case precludes the possibility of it. Dr. X's and my opinion both are that if he gets safely through the operation he will be restored to his original and responsible identity, whichever that may prove to be, without any recollection of anything that has taken place in his irresponsible state."

"A comfortable state of mind for the man, but what of the dishonored woman?" said Shreves fiercely.

"That is for the victims themselves to decide. Dr. X will put the case before them in a purely professional light; he will warn them of the danger to be incurred in an operation, the hopeless imbecility that is inevitable without it; will state the arguments for and against the sane identity of Mordeck and Dunbar; then leave it to them to decide whether or not they will avail themselves of this one chance out of many mischances for his restoration to a state of consciousness which will involve for one of them the greatest sacrifice in human power to make. In his present condition

he is dead to both of them, and soon will be dead to the world and to all human emotions; actual death would be a boon compared to such an existence. The only question, then, in my mind, to be decided is, will the love of either woman be great and unselfish enough to give him this one chance of life, reason and happiness at the cost of her own happiness and honor, or at the possible cost, I may say, for each woman has two out of three chances to escape the sacrifice: one chance in the death of our patient under or from the operation, and one in proving to be his legal wife."

"Heaven pity those whose happiness hangs on so slender a thread!"

"Amen!" responded Dr. Garrard, while his eyes rested with sympathy on the young man.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHEN the prow of the *Albemarle* dashed into the side of the *Southfield*, carrying her to the bottom of the Roanoke, the soldiers on board the sinking vessel had no time to discuss how, where, or by whom the destructive ram had been given its fatal power. It mattered not to them then whether they would have believed that a vessel could be constructed out in a cornfield with almost unattainable machinery scattered about the country, a portable sawmill here, a smith's forge there, innumerable difficulties to be overcome and adverse circumstances to contend against—a vessel that could knock a hole in a ship large enough to sink her in less time than it had taken to drill a one-inch hole through one of her own plates. The *Albemarle* had been constructed, the *Southfield* run into, and the only problem left for the soldiers to solve was how to escape a watery grave.

This instance of a double life led securely by a man for over a score of years in the narrow limits of a single city was an extraordinary case, and one that might well have raised doubts in the minds of the most credulous, had it not presented itself in the grim form of an incontrovertible fact to be faced instead of a suspicion to be confirmed or refuted. There was in this story wide scope for a

detective's ingenuity, as there was for a builder's in the construction of the *Albemarle*; but Dr. Garrard and Mr. Chilson had no time even for ascertaining the truth or falsity of Captain Dunbar's assertions as to his birthplace and early history. Chilson, it is true, sent a number of telegrams, but no one could give him the information he sought.

There was no time for argument, debate or procrastination; Mr. Mordeck's condition admitted of no delay. If he was to be given the one chance in his favor, out of the number that were accumulating against him daily, he must be operated upon at once.

Ethel Mordeck and Marguerite Dunbar were at the hospital, but had not as yet seen one another. They had come by the same train, but in different coaches, from Chicago to the beautiful little eastern city, on one of whose elevations the Sanitarium was situated; and after a safe arrival and short rest, they had been dealt, as gently as tender friendship could make it, the inevitable blow.

Dr. Garrard came out of Mrs. Mordeck's room nervous, excited, and using his handkerchief with equal vigor on neck, nose, eyes and forehead. Shreves closed Mrs. Dunbar's door very softly behind him and came out looking pale and quiet. They met in the wide corridor.

"What next?" said Shreves, and his voice sounded harsh even to himself.

"How much did you tell her?" asked Dr. Garrard, disregarding Shreves' question.

"Everything except the disagreement between you and Dr. X as to which is the responsible man, Dunbar or Mordeck. I couldn't tell her that," and Shreves shuddered.

"I left that out, too," said the doctor. "Poor little Ethel has as much as she could stand at one time."

A piercing cry startled them, and they rushed to Mrs. Mordeck's door. But swift as they were, another had been swifter and had seized the knob ere they could lay hold of it.

"Let me attend her! I shall go mad if left alone." Mrs. Dunbar slipped through the door and closed it after her.

"Is it safe to let her go in there?"

"If it is safe to admit an angel from Heaven it is!" said Shreves with a reverence that awed Dr. Garrard.

A neat, grave-looking woman, in the uniform of the hospital, came down the hall and stopped at Mrs. Mordeck's door. "I have instructions from Dr. X," explained she, and went in.

"That's all right," said Dr. Garrard to Shreves. "X has promised to keep the matter as quiet as possible, and if he has sent this woman to attend the ladies, she knows how to hold her tongue."

Inside of the room Ethel Mordeck lay on a couch, giving herself up to her sorrow without any effort at self-control. She had walked the floor and stifled her sobs until the strain had become too great, and, crying aloud, she had flung herself

upon the couch in a perfect abandonment of woe.

Marguerite Dunbar kneeled by her side, and her dark, pitying eyes gazed with a calming influence into the big, blue, childish ones uplifted to hers in wild alarm.

"Why did you come here, Mrs.—"

"Marguerite is my name."

"Poor Marguerite!"

"What is your name?"

"Ethel."

Mrs. Dunbar repeated the name softly, but her pity was expressed not by commiserating adjectives, but by a caressing stroke of the head covered with a waving mass of disheveled brown hair.

While each woman felt that her own sorrow was almost greater than she could bear, yet each had room in her heart for pity for her who had been robbed, not only of her husband's name, but of half his life and love; and neither realized that it was her husband's identity that was being questioned.

"Have you seen him?" whispered Ethel, bursting into tears and hiding her face against Marguerite's shoulder.

"No; have you?"

Ethel could not see the fierce gleam that shot from Marguerite Dunbar's eyes as she asked the question, nor the softened look the silent, negative answer restored. A question of superiority of right was sprung in Mrs. Dunbar's mind. To

whom should be shown the greater consideration; to her whose claim was established by law and science, or to her that had been the more wronged? Her heart rebelled at the sacrifice her mind suggested, but she yielded so far as to tell herself that she could take Ethel with her to the bedside of the man who would be as unconscious of their presence as he was of the wrong that had brought them there.

"Ethel," said she very low, "would you mind going with me to see Jack?"

"Whom?" queried Mrs. Mordeck vaguely.

"To see him," she repeated, not knowing what Ethel called him and unable to utter the name had she known.

"Oh no! I should be so glad! Dr. Garrard said he would not know me, and I did so dread going by myself."

"What if he were to know me and not you?" said Mrs. Dunbar with a cruelty she could not master, torturing herself thereby as much as she did her victim.

"I should die, shouldn't you?"

The naïve question held no ambiguity for Marguerite Dunbar, and she answered with a sad smile, while her lips became compressed and white:

"No, I should not die; but it would hurt me."

The woman in hospital uniform now came forward from a remote position she had taken when she had first entered the room, and said kindly,

without any jarring consciousness in voice or manner: "Dr. X would like to see you, ladies, whenever you are ready to receive him."

The two women looked at one another, one with clinging dependence, the other with jealous determination.

"Tell him we will see him now," said Mrs. Dunbar.

Dr. X came, and after a few strained, irrelevant remarks, broached the subject that required such delicate handling. He began and explained the nature of his patient's trouble, the cause of it, the one remedy known, its danger, uncertainty, etc., but the glorious triumph in case the operation proved successful.

The effect of his speech upon his listeners was something marvelous. Their eyes sparkled, their cheeks flushed, their breath came in excited gasps or was suspended in anticipation, and Dr. X began to realize that neither woman saw anything to be dreaded in the coming operation save the risk and suffering to the man each loved. He hesitated, stammered, stopped short off. The women turned their radiant faces from him to each other. A childish resentment crept into Ethel Mordeck's, a fierce jealousy leaped into Marguerite Dunbar's. Dr. X grew restless and uneasy, and suggested that they should send for Dr. Garrard and Mr. Chilson. . . . They came, and Dr. Garrard crossed over to Mrs. Mordeck's side and Shreves to Mrs. Dunbar's, tacitly offer-

ing their support in the coming ordeal. Dr. X had prepared them for everything save the fact that from conflicting teachings and testimony of experts the chances for restoring their patient to life and reason, as Mr. Mordeck or Captain Dunbar, were about equal; but how to break this last to them he did not know, and he shrank from his task with an unaccountable dread.

"Mrs. Dunbar, Mrs. Mordeck, have you duly considered the fact that in sanctioning the operation we desire to perform, it is not in human power to assure you which identity the result will establish as that of the sane and responsible man?"

"Shreves, Shreves!—oh, my God! is there a doubt?" cried Marguerite Dunbar, seizing his arm in a vise that made him wince.

Dr. Garrard reached out a strong arm and saved Mrs. Mordeck from sinking beneath the blow of the first suspicion that had crossed her mind. She raised her white face to him with a mute agony in the big blue eyes, dry enough now, and said with heartrending pathos:

"Doctor, are they trying to take him away from me altogether?"

CHAPTER XXV.

“INSANITY being the result of physical disease, it is a matter of fact to be determined by medical experts, not a matter of law to be decided by legal tests and maxims,” Dr. Buckham had said, and the verdict of four physicians had declared the actor in this case of double life to be insane and not criminal. Since those who had suffered by it showed no disposition to question the verdict, the secret of the millionaire’s and the gambler’s life seemed destined to be shielded forever from the world’s curious ken within the walls of the Sanitarium.

The operation was performed, and as its sequel life and death were contesting every moment of time in the darkened chamber.

Far away in their palatial home, with closed doors and blinds, silence and gloom shrouding them as a cloud whose silver lining had been turned away from them forever, sat Browné and Tom Mordeck awaiting the result that was to restore to them their father or leave them orphans—nay, perhaps worse than fatherless, Browné knew, but that knowledge was not to be Tom’s, nor was it to be Naida Dunbar’s; it was no longer in any one’s power to spare Browné.

Naida, in her pretty little home, cared for by the trusty old servants, man and wife, who had protected her and her mother always, so far as she could remember, devoted her time to her music and birds, and deplored her mother's absence more frequently than she did the illness that might leave her fatherless.

"Will papa never get well enough to let mamma come home!" she exclaimed petulantly one day; and, irritated by the shrill song of her canary, she ran her slim white fingers through the wires of the cage and broke his tiny neck.

The time had come for the test that was to exalt one woman to the heights of bliss and sink the other to the depths of despair. Neither would yield a jot or tittle of her vantage-ground of honored wifeness; he should see them both together; neither should have the advantage of the earliest impression upon his returning consciousness. They quietly but firmly refused to be spared the ordeal; they could take no man's word, no number of men's words, for the irrevocable judgment that was to be passed upon them. The physicians had assured them he would know but one of them, consequently they argued the presence of the other could not injure him.

The preparation for this interview was as solemnly terrible as the will-making of a man condemned to death.

"Ethel," said Dr. Garrard, taking her two small hands in one of his and covering them with the

other, "have you thought what you will do if fate draws the black curtain of oblivion across your past?"

She looked up at him with the simple faith of a child who has asked of a loving parent a boon that will not be denied.

"I shall die. I have asked God to let me," said she with a grave, confident smile.

Dr. Garrard could not argue the question with her, indeed, he did not know whether it was necessary; he, too, felt that her heart was bared for the blow, and that if it came she would never know but the one sharp pain.

"You, too, have thought of the dark side, dear Mrs. Dunbar, have you not?" he asked, turning toward the woman for whom he could have no feeling save the deepest pity.

"Yes, I have thought of it," said she quietly, and the fire that had smoldered in her dark eyes seemed all at once to have gone out. "I wish I had Ethel's happy assurance of rest; but I have not. I shall live on and on and on. Naida will have your name, Shreves, and I shall not need any where I go; Marguerite will be name enough to teach unchristianized little ones to pronounce, and the older ones can add the title of their nationality. Do not ask me where I shall go; I don't know, and I would not tell if I did. If God punishes me for having worshiped Jack instead of Him I will go to some foreign land and try, by good deeds, to obtain a pardon that will permit



my soul, when disembodied, to go and join Jack's spirit wherever it may be wandering—ah, sweet Heaven! where will it wander, where, where, where?" cried she starting up. "It cannot lurk in the body usurped by another mind; yet it is as imperishable as the spirit robbing it of its tenement!—imperishable? Is it imperishable? Everything else is slipping away from me.—Oh, Merciful God! spare me Jack, spare me his memory, don't let him prove a dream, a myth, a nothing!" She stood in the center of the room, where a few excited strides had brought her, and as she finished her piteous prayer she held out her hands to Shreves, and bowing her head, burst into the first tears that had relieved her overcharged heart since she had learned of the fatal uncertainty.

An oppressive silence settled upon all, a silence that remained unbroken till she lifted her head and looked at each one with a peculiar intentness, saying quietly:

"We are wasting time; you said ten minutes ago we might see him. Come, Ethel," turning to her with a smile, "we must go to our rooms and prepare ourselves; he would not own either of us as we now look."

As the two women left the room Dr. Garrard remarked: "What an elastic temperament!"

"Mercurial, rather," corrected Dr. X, looking serious. "Some of these days nature will call a halt at one or the other of these extremes, and we shall have her here, perhaps. The test will soon

be brought to bear, however, and we shall see. According to my feelings it would have been better to let him die; but conscience and a duty to our profession would not allow that, and now we shall have to witness, what we shall have to witness. It is Mrs. Mordeck's heart I fear for, but Mrs. Dunbar's mind."

On a couch in a semi-darkened room lay the man who in a confusion of identities was beggared of a name. His eyes looked about him with quiet consciousness, but were unkindled by curiosity. He asked and was asked very few questions, and the greatest care was taken not to address him by any name that would aid memory in recalling the past.

When his nurse came to him with something to drink, he pushed it aside for a moment and, looking out the window and afar off at a cemetery gleaming cold and desolate in the distance, inquired:

"Would they have buried me over there had I died?"

"Why should they have buried you over there?"

"Because all the others are there, father, sister Mary and little Sam, yes, and mother too, I think. She died after I went to the war. I wrote to her about the pretty daughter I was going to bring her when we were through fighting. She never answered the letter, and I heard afterward she was dead; but I ought to have gone back to the

old place. I wonder why I did not? I'm sure I am eager enough to do so now. I will go over and go through the old house as soon as I am well enough. What is the matter with me, anyway? My senses seem to be in a muddle. I wish you would send for"—he paused and fixed his eyes on the two figures approaching his bedside.

They tried to approach him carelessly, naturally, as if their jealously maintained juxtaposition were without a motive; but artificialness had to yield to realism in this supreme moment, and the intensity of the scene affected all within its influence. Dr. Garrard's heart hammered away on the antithetical problem, Ethel or Marguerite? Ethel or Marguerite? and Dr. X's thoughts revolved the query, death or insanity? death or insanity? until the climax was almost as welcome to them as to the women whose fate hung on the lips now parted to pronounce their doom.

"Why, she is already here—Ethel!"

The earth reeled, darkness came down about her, and Ethel Mordeck would have fallen to the floor but for the cruel grip on her shoulders and the voice whispering fiercely in her ears: "Don't faint; think of the effect on him, the excitement might kill him! Be worthy of your happiness! Good-by—forever!"

Marguerite Dunbar turned and swiftly left the room. Outside the door she met Shreves.

"Go, telegraph Naida that her father is dead!" she said, and disappeared.

Shreves went to do her bidding. There was some delay at the office before he could get the message received; and when he had at last succeeded and was starting away, the agent called him back to receive a message coming over the wires to him. He took the unofficial slip of paper handed him without an envelope, and read:

"MASTER SHREVES: For the dear Lord's sake come home! Little mistress dropped dead just this minute! LIJA."

"Just this minute" might have meant an hour ago, and Shreves thought of the poor little struggling spirit that had been drawn from its perfect tenement of clay and made to wander with that of the father who had always controlled her as a puppet. Psychologists might have discovered an interesting problem in this simultaneous disembodiment of spirits from a usurped and a duplicated tenement, but such a death seemed horribly unnatural, uncanny to Shreves, and he shivered even though it was midday.

He took the dispatch to Mrs. Dunbar, thinking that one trouble might counteract the other, that the tangible one might divert her mind from the intangible one. She read and re-read the dispatch, and folded it smoothly and drew it between her fingers.

"God is making my exile easy," said she with a calm that had not been broken since her doom was pronounced. "Naida would not have filled

your heart, Shreves; she starved mine. My beautiful child! she is at rest now—at perfect rest—without in reality ever having known anything of life's disquiet. Let us go home, Shreves, to see our dead. Ah, what a comfort it is to be able to see one's dead!"

